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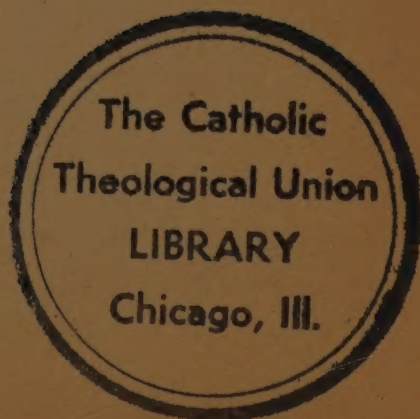
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FIVE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES

ALCESTIS

MEDEA

THE TROJAN WOMEN

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

ELECTRA



*References in the Notes
are to the original
Greek Texts*

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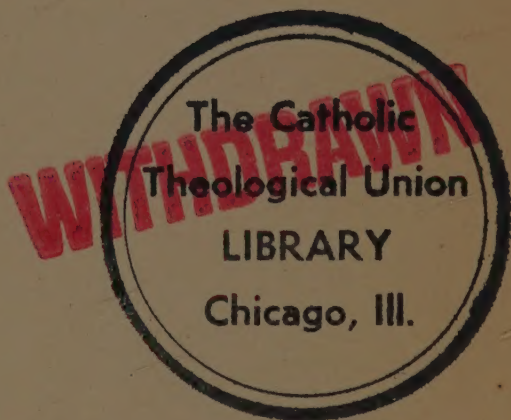
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

ELECTRA

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

GILBERT MURRAY, LL.D., D.LITT.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD



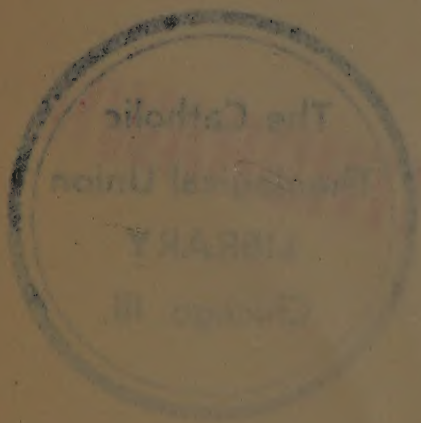
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1934

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IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

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ALCESTIS
OF
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ALCESTIS

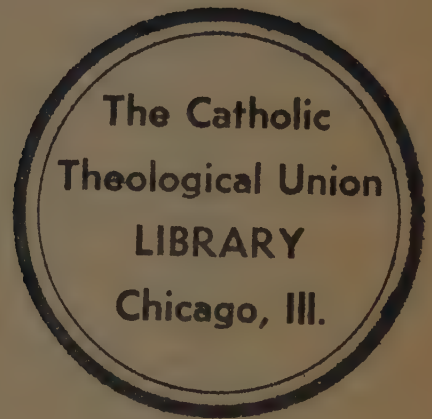


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INTRODUCTION

THE *Alcestis* would hardly confirm its author's right to be acclaimed "the most tragic of the poets." It is doubtful whether one can call it a tragedy at all. Yet it remains one of the most characteristic and delightful of Euripidean dramas, as well as, by modern standards, the most easilyactable. And I notice that many judges who display nothing but a fierce satisfaction in sending other plays of that author to the block or the treadmill, show a certain human weakness in sentencing the gentle daughter of Pelias.

The play has been interpreted in many different ways. There is the old unsophisticated view, well set forth in Paley's preface of 1872. He regards the *Alcestis* simply as a triumph of pathos, especially of "that peculiar sort of pathos which comes most home to us, with our views and partialities for domestic life. . . . As for the characters, that of Alcestis must be acknowledged to be pre-eminently beautiful. One could almost imagine that Euripides had not yet conceived that bad opinion of the sex which so many of the subsequent dramas exhibit. . . . But the rest are hardly well-drawn, or, at least, pleasingly portrayed." "The poet might perhaps, had he pleased, have exhibited Admetus in a more amiable point of view."

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This criticism is not very trenchant, but its weakness is due, I think, more to timidity of statement than to lack of perception. Paley does see that a character may be "well-drawn" without necessarily being "pleasing"; and even that he may be eminently pleasing as a part of the play while very displeasing in himself. He sees that Euripides may have had his own reasons for not making Admetus an ideal husband. It seems odd that such points should need mentioning; but Greek drama has always suffered from a school of critics who approach a play with a greater equipment of aesthetic theory than of dramatic perception. This is the characteristic defect of classicism. One mark of the school is to demand from dramatists heroes and heroines which shall satisfy its own ideals; and, though there was in the New Comedy a mask known to Pollux as "The Entirely-good Young Man" (πάγχρηστος νεανίσκος), such a character is fortunately unknown to classical Greek drama.

The influence of this "classicist" tradition has led to a timid and unsatisfying treatment of the *Alcestis*, in which many of the most striking and unconventional features of the whole composition were either ignored or smoothed away. As a natural result, various lively-minded readers proceeded to over-emphasize these particular features, and were carried into eccentricity or paradox. Alfred Schöne, for instance, fixing his attention on just those points which the conventional critic passed over, decides simply that the *Alcestis* is a parody, and finds it very funny. (*Die Alkestis von Euripides*, Kiel, 1895.)

I will not dwell on other criticisms of this type. There are those who have taken the play for a

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criticism of contemporary politics or the current law of inheritance. Above all there is the late Dr. Verrall's famous essay in *Euripides the Rationalist*, explaining it as a psychological criticism of a supposed Delphic miracle, and arguing that Alcestis in the play does not rise from the dead at all. She had never really died; she only had a sort of nervous catalepsy induced by all the "suggestion" of death by which she was surrounded. Now Dr. Verrall's work, as always, stands apart. Even if wrong, it has its own excellence, its special insight and its extraordinary awakening power. But in general the effect of reading many criticisms on the *Alcestis* is to make a scholar realize that, for all the seeming simplicity of the play, competent Grecians have been strangely bewildered by it, and that after all there is no great reason to suppose that he himself is more sensible than his neighbours.

This is depressing. None the less I cannot really believe that, if we make patient use of our available knowledge, the *Alcestis* presents any startling enigma. In the first place, it has long been known from the remnants of the ancient Didascalia, or official notice of production, that the *Alcestis* was produced as the fourth play of a series; that is, it took the place of a Satyr-play. It is what we may call Pro-satyrical. (See the present writer's introduction to the *Rhesus*.) And we should note for what it is worth the observation in the ancient Greek argument: "The play is somewhat satyr-like (*σατυρικώτερον*). It ends in rejoicing and gladness against the tragic convention."

Now we are of late years beginning to understand much better what a Satyr-play was. Satyrs have, of

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course, nothing to do with satire, either etymologically or otherwise. Satyrs are the attendant daemons who form the Kômos, or revel rout, of Dionysus. They are represented in divers fantastic forms, the human or divine being mixed with that of some animal, especially the horse or wild goat. Like Dionysus himself, they are connected in ancient religion with the Renewal of the Earth in spring and the resurrection of the dead, a point which students of the *Alcestis* may well remember. But in general they represent mere joyous creatures of nature, unthwarted by law and unchecked by self-control. Two notes are especially struck by them: the passions and the absurdity of half-drunken revellers, and the joy and mystery of the wild things in the forest.

The rule was that after three tragedies proper there came a play, still in tragic diction, with a traditional saga plot and heroic characters, in which the Chorus was formed by these Satyrs. There was a deliberate clash, an effect of burlesque; but of course the clash must not be too brutal. Certain characters of the heroic saga are, so to speak, at home with Satyrs and others are not. To take our extant specimens of Satyr-plays, for instance: in the *Cyclops* we have Odysseus, the heroic trickster; in the fragmentary *Ichneutae* of Sophocles we have the Nymph Cyllene, hiding the baby Hermes from the chorus by the most barefaced and pleasant lying; later no doubt there was an entrance of the infant thief himself. Autolycus, Sisyphus, Thersites are all Satyr-play heroes and congenial to the Satyr atmosphere; but the most congenial of all, the one hero who existed always in an atmo-

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sphere of Satyrs and the Kômos until Euripides made him the central figure of a tragedy, was Heracles.¹

The complete Satyr-play had a hero of this type and a Chorus of Satyrs. But the complete type was refined away during the fifth century; and one stage in the process produced a play with a normal chorus but with one figure of the Satyric or "revelling" type. One might almost say the "comic" type if, for the moment, we may remember that that word is directly derived from 'Kômos.'

The *Alcestis* is a very clear instance of this Pro-satyric class of play. It has the regular tragic diction, marked here and there (393, 756, 780, etc.) by slight extravagances and forms of words which are sometimes epic and sometimes over-colloquial; it has a regular saga plot, which had already been treated by the old poet Phrynichus in his *Alcestis*, a play which is now lost but seems to have been Satyric; and it has one character straight from the Satyr world, the heroic reveller, Heracles. It is all in keeping that he should arrive tired, should feast and drink and sing; should be suddenly sobered and should go forth to battle with Death. It is also in keeping that the contest should have a half-grotesque and half-ghastly touch, the grapple amid the graves and the cracking ribs.

So much for the traditional form. As for the subject, Euripides received it from Phrynichus, and

¹ The character of Heracles in connexion with the Kômos, already indicated by Wilamowitz and Dieterich (*Herakles*², pp. 98, ff.; *Pulcinella*, pp. 63, ff.), has been illuminatingly developed in an unpublished monograph by Mr. J. A. K. Thomson, of Aberdeen.

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doubtless from other sources. We cannot be sure of the exact form of the story in Phrynichus. But apparently it told how Admetus, King of Pherae in Thessaly, received from Apollo a special privilege which the God had obtained, in true Satyric style, by making the Three Fates drunk and cajoling them. This was that, when his appointed time for death came, he might escape if he could find some volunteer to die for him. His father and mother, from whom the service might have been expected, refused to perform it. His wife, Alcestis, though no blood relation, handsomely undertook it and died. But it so happened that Admetus had entertained in his house the demi-god, Heracles; and when Heracles heard what had happened, he went out and wrestled with Death, conquered him, and brought Alcestis home.

Given this form and this story, the next question is: What did Euripides make of them? The general answer is clear: he has applied his usual method. He accepts the story as given in the tradition, and then represents it in his own way. When the tradition in question is really heroic, we know what his way is. He preserves, and even emphasizes, the stateliness and formality of the Attic stage conventions; but, in the meantime, he has subjected the story and its characters to a keener study and a more sensitive psychological judgment than the simple things were originally meant to bear. So that many characters which passed as heroic, or at least presentable, in the kindly remoteness of legend, reveal some strange weakness when brought suddenly into the light. When the tradition is Satyric, as here, the same process produces almost an opposite effect. It is somewhat as though the main plot of a

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gross and jolly farce were pondered over and made more true to human character till it emerged as a refined and rather pathetic comedy. The making drunk of the Three Grey Sisters disappears; one can only just see the trace of its having once been present. The revelling of Heracles is touched in with the lightest of hands; it is little more than symbolic. And all the figures in the story, instead of being left broadly comic or having their psychology neglected, are treated delicately, sympathetically, with just that faint touch of satire, or at least of amusement, which is almost inseparable from a close interest in character.

What was Admetus really like, this gallant prince who had won the affection of such great guests as Apollo and Heracles, and yet went round asking other people to die for him; who, in particular, accepted his wife's monstrous sacrifice with satisfaction and gratitude? The play portrays him well. Generous, innocent, artistic, affectionate, eloquent, impulsive, a good deal spoilt, unconsciously insincere, and no doubt fundamentally selfish, he hates the thought of dying and he hates losing his wife almost as much. Why need she die? Why could it not have been some one less important to him? He feels with emotion what a beautiful act it would have been for his old father. "My boy, you have a long and happy life before you, and for me the sands are well-nigh run out. Do not seek to dissuade me. I will die for you." Admetus could compose the speech for him. A touching scene, a noble farewell, and all the dreadful trouble solved—so conveniently solved! And the miserable self-blinded old man could not see it!

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Euripides seems to have taken positive pleasure in Admetus, much as Meredith did in his famous *Egoist*; but Euripides all through is kinder to his victim than Meredith is. True, Admetus is put to obvious shame, publicly and helplessly. The Chorus make discreet comments upon him. The Handmaid is outspoken about him. One feels that Alcestis herself, for all her tender kindness, has seen through him. Finally, to make things quite clear, his old father fights him openly, tells him home-truth upon home-truth, tears away all his protective screens, and leaves him with his self-respect in tatters. It is a fearful ordeal for Admetus, and, after his first fury, he takes it well. He comes back from his wife's burial a changed man. He says not much, but enough. "I have done wrong. I have only now learnt my lesson. I imagined I could save my happy life by forfeiting my honour; and the result is that I have lost both." I think that a careful reading of the play will show an almost continuous process of self-discovery and self-judgment in the mind of Admetus. He was a man who blinded himself with words and beautiful sentiments; but he was not thick-skinned or thick-witted. He was not a brute or a cynic. And I think he did learn his lesson . . . not completely and for ever, but as well as most of us learn such lessons.

The beauty of Alcestis is quite untouched by the dramatist's keener analysis. The strong light only increases its effect. Yet she is not by any means a mere blameless ideal heroine; and the character which Euripides gives her makes an admirable foil to that of Admetus. Where he is passionate and romantic, she

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is simple and homely. While he is still refusing to admit the facts and beseeching her not to "desert" him, she in a gentle but businesslike way makes him promise to take care of the children and, above all things, not to marry again. She could not possibly trust Admetus's choice. She is sure that the step-mother would be unkind to the children. She might be a horror and beat them (l. 307). And when Admetus has made a thrilling answer about eternal sorrow, and the silencing of lyre and lute, and the statue who shall be his only bride, Alcestis earnestly calls the attention of witnesses to the fact that he has sworn not to marry again. She is not an artist like Admetus. There is poetry in her, because poetry comes unconsciously out of deep feeling, but there is no artistic eloquence. Her love, too, is quite different from his. To him, his love for his wife and children is a beautiful thing, a subject to speak and sing about as well as an emotion to feel. But her love is hardly conscious. She does not talk about it at all. She is merely wrapped up in the welfare of certain people, first her husband and then the children. To a modern romantic reader her insistence that her husband shall not marry again seems hardly delicate. But she does not think about romance or delicacy. To her any neglect to ensure due protection for the children would be as unnatural as to refuse to die for her husband. Indeed, Professor J. L. Myres has suggested that care for the children's future is the guiding motive of her whole conduct. There was first the danger of their being left fatherless, a dire calamity in the heroic age. She could meet that danger by dying herself. Then followed the danger

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of a stepmother. She meets that by making Admetus swear never to marry. In the long run, I fancy, the effect of gracious loveliness which Alcestis certainly makes is not so much due to any words of her own as to what the Handmaid and the Serving Man say about her. In the final scene she is silent; necessarily and rightly silent, for all tradition knows that those new-risen from the dead must not speak. It will need a long *rite de passage* before she can freely commune with this world again. It is a strange and daring scene between the three of them; the humbled and broken-hearted husband; the triumphant Heracles, kindly and wise, yet still touched by the mocking and blustrous atmosphere from which he sprang; and the silent woman who has seen the other side of the grave. It was always her way to know things but not to speak of them.

The other characters fall easily into their niches. We have only to remember the old Satyric tradition and to look at them in the light of their historical development. Heracles indeed, half-way on his road from the roaring reveller of the Satyr-play to the suffering and erring deliverer of tragedy, is a little foreign to our notions, but quite intelligible and strangely attractive. The same historical method seems to me to solve most of the difficulties which have been felt about Admetus's hospitality. Heracles arrives at the castle just at the moment when Alcestis is lying dead in her room; Admetus conceals the death from him and insists on his coming in and enjoying himself. What are we to think of this behaviour? Is it magnificent hospitality, or is it gross want of tact? The answer, I think, is indicated above.

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In the uncritical and boisterous atmosphere of the Satyr-play it was natural hospitality, not especially laudable or surprising. From the analogy of similar stories I suspect that Admetus originally did not know his guest, and received not so much the reward of exceptional virtue as the blessing naturally due to those who entertain angels unawares. If we insist on asking whether Euripides himself, in real life or in a play of his own free invention, would have considered Admetus's conduct to Heracles entirely praiseworthy, the answer will certainly be No, but it will have little bearing on the play. In the *Alcestis*, as it stands, the famous act of hospitality is a datum of the story. Its claims are admitted on the strength of the tradition. It was the act for which Admetus was specially and marvellously rewarded; therefore, obviously, it was an act of exceptional merit and piety. Yet the admission is made with a smile, and more than one suggestion is allowed to float across the scene that in real life such conduct would be hardly wise.

Heracles, who rose to tragic rank from a very homely cycle of myth, was apt to bring other homely characters with him. He was a great killer not only of malefactors but of "kêres" or bogeys, such as "Old Age" and "Ague" and the sort of "Death" that we find in this play. Thanatos is not a god, not at all a King of Terrors. One may compare him with the dancing skeleton who is called Death in mediaeval writings. When such a figure appears on the tragic stage one asks at once what relation he bears to Hades, the great Olympian king of the unseen. The answer is obvious. Thanatos is the

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servant of Hades, a "priest" or sacrificer, who is sent to fetch the appointed victims.

The other characters speak for themselves. Certainly Pheres can be trusted to do so, though we must remember that we see him at an unfortunate moment. The aged monarch is not at his best, except perhaps in mere fighting power. I doubt if he was really as cynical as he here professes to be.

In the above criticisms I feel that I may have done what critics are so apt to do. I have dwelt on questions of intellectual interest and perhaps thereby diverted attention from that quality in the play which is the most important as well as by far the hardest to convey; I mean the sheer beauty and delightfulness of the writing. It is the earliest dated play of Euripides which has come down to us. True, he was over forty when he produced it, but it is noticeably different from the works of his old age. The numbers are smoother, the thought less deeply scarred, the language more charming and less passionate. If it be true that poetry is bred out of joy and sorrow, one feels as if more enjoyment and less suffering had gone to the making of the *Alcestis* than to that of the later plays.

ALCESTIS

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

ADMÊTUS, *King of Pherae in Thessaly.*

ALCESTIS, *daughter of Pelias, his wife.*

PHERÊS, *his father, formerly King but now in retirement.*

TWO CHILDREN, *his son and daughter.*

A MANSERVANT *in his house.*

A HANDMAID.

The Hero HERACLES.

The God APOLLO.

THANÁTOS *or* DEATH.

CHORUS, *consisting of Elders of Pherae.*

"The play was first performed when Glaukînos was Archon, in the 2nd year of the 85th Olympiad (438 B.C.). Sophocles was first, Euripides second with the Cretan Women, Alcmaeon in Psophis, Telephus and Alcestis. . . . The play is somewhat Satyric in character."

ALCESTIS

The scene represents the ancient Castle of ADMETUS near Pherae in Thessaly. It is the dusk before dawn; APOLLO, radiant in the darkness, looks at the Castle.

APOLLO.

Admetus' House! 'Twas here I bowed my head
Of old, and chafed not at the bondman's bread,
Though born in heaven. Aye, Zeus to death had hurled
My son, Asclepios, Healer of the World,
Piercing with fire his heart; and in mine ire
I slew his Cyclop churls, who forged the fire.
Whereat Zeus cast me forth to bear the yoke
Of service to a mortal. To this folk
I came, and watched a stranger's herd for pay,
And all his house I have prospered to this day.
For innocent was the Lord I chanced upon
And clean as mine own heart, King Pheres' son,
Admetus. Him I rescued from the grave,
Beguiling the Grey Sisters till they gave
A great oath that Admetus should go free,
Would he but pay to Them Below in fee
Another living soul. Long did he prove
All that were his, and all that owed him love,
But never a soul he found would yield up life

And leave the sunlight for him, save his wife:
Who, even now, down the long galleries
Is borne, death-wounded; for this day it is
She needs must pass out of the light and die.
And, seeing the stain of death must not come nigh
My radiance, I must leave this house I love.

But ha! The Headsman of the Pit, above
Earth's floor, to ravish her! Aye, long and late
He hath watched, and cometh at the fall of fate.

*Enter from the other side THANATOS; a crouching
black-haired and winged figure, carrying a drawn
sword. He starts in revulsion on seeing APOLLO.*

THANATOS.

Aha!

Why here? What mak'st thou at the gate,
Thou Thing of Light? Wilt overtread
The eternal judgment, and abate
And spoil the portions of the dead?
'Tis not enough for thee to have blocked
In other days Admetus' doom
With craft of magic wine, which mocked
The three grey Sisters of the Tomb;
But now once more
I see thee stand at watch, and shake
That arrow-armèd hand to make
This woman thine, who swore, who swore,
To die now for her husband's sake.

APOLLO.

Fear not.

I bring fair words and seek but what is just.

ALCESTIS

THANATOS (*sneering*).

And if words help thee not, an arrow must?

APOLLO.

'Tis ever my delight to bear this bow.

THANATOS.

And aid this house unjustly? Aye, 'tis so.

APOLLO.

I love this man, and grieve for his dismay.

THANATOS.

And now wilt rob me of my second prey!

APOLLO.

I never robbed thee, neither then nor now.

THANATOS.

Why is Admetus here then, not below?

APOLLO.

He gave for ransom his own wife, for whom . . .

THANATOS (*interrupting*).

I am come; and straight will bear her to the tomb.

APOLLO.

Go, take her.—I can never move thine heart.

THANATOS (*mocking*).

To slay the doomed?—Nay; I will do my part.

APOLLO.

No. To keep death for them that linger late.

THANATOS (*still mocking*).

'Twould please thee, so? . . . I owe thee homage
great.

APOLLO.

Ah, then she may yet . . . she may yet grow old?

THANATOS (*with a laugh*).

No! . . . I too have my rights, and them I hold.

APOLLO.

'Tis but one life thou gainest either-wise.

THANATOS.

When young souls die, the richer is my prize.

APOLLO.

Old, with great riches they will bury her.

THANATOS.

Fie on thee, fie! Thou rich-man's lawgiver!

APOLLO.

How? Is there wit in Death, who seemed so blind?

THANATOS.

The rich would buy long life for all their kind.

ALCESTIS

APOLLO.

Thou wilt not grant me, then, this boon? 'Tis so?

THANATOS.

Thou knowest me, what I am: I tell thee, no!

APOLLO.

I know gods sicken at thee and men pine.

THANATOS.

Begone! Too many things not meant for thine
Thy greed hath conquered; but not all, not all!

APOLLO.

I swear, for all thy bitter pride, a fall
Awaits thee. One even now comes conquering
Towards this house, sent by a southland king
To fetch him four wild coursers, of the race
Which rend men's bodies in the winds of Thrace.
This house shall give him welcome good, and he
Shall wrest this woman from thy worms and thee.
So thou shalt give me all, and thereby win
But hatred, not the grace that might have been.

[*Exit* APOLLO.]

THANATOS.

Talk on, talk on! Thy threats shall win no bride
From me.—This woman, whatsoever betide,
Shall lie in Hades' house. Even at the word
I go to lay upon her hair my sword.
For all whose head this grey sword visiteth
To death are hallowed and the Lords of death.

[THANATOS goes into the house. Presently, as the day grows lighter, the CHORUS enters: it consists of Citizens of Pherae, who speak severally.

CHORUS.

LEADER.

Quiet, quiet, above, beneath!

SECOND ELDER.

The house of Admetus holds its breath.

THIRD ELDER.

And never a King's friend near,
To tell us either of tears to shed
For Pelias' daughter, crowned and dead;
Or joy, that her eyes are clear.
Bravest, truest of wives is she
That I have seen or the world shall see.

DIVERS CITIZENS, *conversing*.

(*The dash — indicates a new speaker.*)

- Hear ye no sob, or noise of hands
Beating the breast? No mourners' cries
For one they cannot save?
- Nothing: and at the door there stands
No handmaid.—Help, O Paian; rise,
O star beyond the wave!
- Dead, and this quiet? No, it cannot be.
- Dead, dead!—Not gone to burial secretly!

- Why? I still fear: what makes your speech so
brave?
- Admetus cast that dear wife to the grave
Alone, with none to see?
- I see no bowl of clear spring water.
It ever stands before the dread
Door where a dead man rests.
- No lock of shorn hair! Every daughter
Of woman shears it for the dead.
No sound of bruised breasts!
- Yet 'tis this very day . . .—This very day?
- The Queen should pass and lie beneath the clay.
- It hurts my life, my heart! — All honest hearts
Must sorrow for a brightness that departs,
A good life worn away.

LEADER.

To wander o'er leagues of land,
To search over wastes of sea,
Where the Prophets of Lycia stand,
Or where Ammon's daughters three
Make runes in the rainless sand,
For magic to make her free—
Ah, vain! for the end is here;
Sudden it comes and sheer.
What lamb on the altar-strand
Stricken shall comfort me?

SECOND ELDER.

Only, only one, I know:
Apollo's son was he,

Who healed men long ago.
Were he but on earth to see,
She would rise from the dark below
And the gates of eternity.
For men whom the Gods had slain
He pitied and raised again;
Till God's fire laid him low,
And now, what help have we?

OTHERS.

All's done that can be. Every vow
Full paid; and every altar's brow
Full crowned with spice of sacrifice.
No help remains nor respite now.

Enter from the Castle a HANDMAID, almost in tears.

LEADER.

But see, a handmaid cometh, and the tear
Wet on her cheek! What tidings shall we hear? . . .
Thy grief is natural, daughter, if some ill
Hath fallen to-day. Say, is she living still
Or dead, your mistress? Speak, if speak you may.

MAID.

Alive. No, dead. . . . Oh, read it either way.

LEADER.

Nay, daughter, can the same soul live and die?

MAID.

Her life is broken; death is in her eye.

ALCESTIS

LEADER.

Poor King, to think what she was, and what thou!

MAID.

He never knew her worth. . . . He will know it now.

LEADER.

There is no hope, methinks, to save her still?

MAID.

The hour is come, and breaks all human will.

LEADER.

She hath such tendance as the dying crave?

MAID.

For sure: and rich robes ready for her grave.

LEADER.

'Fore God, she dies high-hearted, aye, and far
In honour raised above all wives that are!

MAID.

Far above all! How other? What must she,
Who seeketh to surpass this woman, be?
Or how could any wife more shining make
Her lord's love, than by dying for his sake?
But thus much all the city knows. 'Tis here,
In her own rooms, the tale will touch thine ear
With strangeness. When she knew the day was
come,

She rose and washed her body, white as foam,
With running water; then the cedarn press
She opened, and took forth her funeral dress
And rich adornment. So she stood arrayed
Before the Hearth-Fire of her home, and prayed:
"Mother, since I must vanish from the day,
This last, last time I kneel to thee and pray;
Be mother to my two children! Find some dear
Helpmate for him, some gentle lord for her.
And let not them, like me, before their hour
Die; let them live in happiness, in our
Old home, till life be full and age content."

To every household altar then she went
And made for each his garland of the green
Boughs of the wind-blown myrtle, and was seen
Praying, without a sob, without a tear.
She knew the dread thing coming, but her clear
Cheek never changed: till suddenly she fled
Back to her own chamber and bridal bed:
Then came the tears and she spoke all her
thought.

"O bed, whereon my laughing girlhood's knot
Was severed by this man, for whom I die,
Farewell! 'Tis thou . . . I speak not bitterly. . . .
'Tis thou hast slain me. All alone I go
Lest I be false to him or thee. And lo,
Some woman shall lie here instead of me—
Happier perhaps; more true she cannot be."

She kissed the pillow as she knelt, and wet
With flooding tears was that fair coverlet.

At last she had had her fill of weeping; then
She tore herself away, and rose again,
Walking with downcast eyes; yet turned before

She had left the room, and cast her down once
more

Kneeling beside the bed. Then to her side
The children came, and clung to her and cried,
And her arms hugged them, and a long good-bye
She gave to each, like one who goes to die.
The whole house then was weeping, every slave
In sorrow for his mistress. And she gave
Her hand to all; aye, none so base was there
She gave him not good words and he to her.

So on Admetus falls from either side
Sorrow. 'Twere bitter grief to him to have died
Himself; and being escaped, how sore a woe
He hath earned instead—Ah, some day he shall
know!

LEADER.

Surely Admetus suffers, even to-day,
For this true-hearted love he hath cast away?

MAID.

He weeps; begs her not leave him desolate,
And holds her to his heart—too late, too late!
She is sinking now, and there, beneath his eye
Fading, the poor cold hand falls languidly,
And faint is all her breath. Yet still she fain
Would look once on the sunlight—once again
And never more. I will go in and tell
Thy presence. Few there be, will serve so well
My master and stand by him to the end.
But thou hast been from olden days our friend.

[The MAID goes in.]

EURIPIDES

vv. 213-225

CHORUS.

THIRD ELDER.

O Zeus,
What escape and where
From the evil thing?
How break the snare
That is round our King?

SECOND ELDER.

Ah list!
One cometh? . . . No.
Let us no more wait;
Make dark our raiment
And shear this hair.

LEADER.

Aye, friends!
'Tis so, even so.
Yet the gods are great
And may send allayment.
To prayer, to prayer!

ALL (*praying*).

O Paian wise!
Some healing of this home devise, devise!
Find, find. . . . Oh, long ago when we were blind
Thine eyes saw mercy . . . find some healing
breath!
Again, O Paian, break the chains that bind;
Stay the red hand of Death!

ALCESTIS

LEADER.

Alas!
 What shame, what dread,
 Thou Pheres' son,
 Shalt be harvested
 When thy wife is gone!

SECOND ELDER.

Ah me;
 For a deed less drear
 Than this thou ruest
 Men have died for sorrow;
 Aye, hearts have bled.

THIRD ELDER.

'Tis she;
 Not as men say dear,
 But the dearest, truest,
 Shall lie ere morrow
 Before thee dead!

ALL.

But lo! Once more!
 She and her husband moving to the door!
 Cry, cry! And thou, O land of Pherae, hearken!
 The bravest of women sinketh, perisheth,
 Under the green earth, down where the shadows darken,
 Down to the House of Death!

[During the last words ADMETUS and ALCESTIS have entered. ALCESTIS is supported by her Handmaids and followed by her two children.]

LEADER.

And who hath said that Love shall bring
More joy to man than fear and strife?
I knew his perils from of old,
I know them now, when I behold
The bitter faring of my King,
Whose love is taken, and his life
Left evermore an empty thing.

ALCESTIS.

O Sun, O light of the day that falls!
O running cloud that races along the sky!

ADMETUS.

They look on thee and me, a stricken twain,
Who have wrought no sin that God should have
thee slain.

ALCESTIS.

Dear Earth, and House of sheltering walls,
And wedded homes of the land where my fathers lie!

ADMETUS.

Fail not, my hapless one. Be strong, and pray
The o'er-mastering Gods to hate us not alway.

ALCESTIS (*faintly, her mind wandering*).

A boat two-oared, upon water; I see, I see.

And the Ferryman of the Dead,
His hand that hangs on the pole, his voice that cries;
"Thou lingerest; come. Come quickly, we wait for
thee."

He is angry that I am slow; he shakes his head.

ALCESTIS

ADMETUS.

Alas, a bitter boat-faring for me,
My bride ill-starred.—Oh, this is misery!

ALCESTIS (*as before*).

Drawing, drawing! 'Tis some one that draweth
me . . .

To the Palaces of the Dead.

So dark. The wings, the eyebrows and ah, the
eyes! . . .

Go back! God's mercy! What seekest thou? Let
me be! . . .

(*Recovering*) Where am I? Ah, and what paths are
these I tread?

ADMETUS.

Grievous for all who love thee, but for me
And my two babes most hard, most solitary.

ALCESTIS.

Hold me not; let me lie.—

I am too weak to stand; and Death is near,
And a slow darkness stealing on my sight.

My little ones, good-bye.

Soon, soon, and mother will be no more here. . . .
Good-bye, two happy children in the light.

ADMETUS.

Oh, word of pain, oh, sharper ache
Than any death of mine had brought!
For the Gods' sake, desert me not,
For thine own desolate children's sake.

Nay, up! Be brave. For if they rend
Thee from me, I can draw no breath;
In thy hand are my life and death,
Thine, my belovèd and my friend!

ALCESTIS.

Admetus, seeing what way my fortunes lie,
I fain would speak with thee before I die.
I have set thee before all things; yea, mine own
Life beside thine was naught. For this alone
I die. . . . Dear Lord, I never need have died.
I might have lived to wed some prince of pride,
Dwell in a king's house. . . . Nay, how could I, torn
From thee, live on, I and my babes forlorn?
I have given to thee my youth—not more nor less,
But all—though I was full of happiness.
Thy father and mother both—'tis strange to tell—
Had failed thee, though for them the deed was well,
The years were ripe, to die and save their son,
The one child of the house: for hope was none,
If thou shouldst pass away, of other heirs.
So thou and I had lived through the long years,
Both. Thou hadst not lain sobbing here alone
For a dead wife and orphan babes. . . . 'Tis done
Now, and some God hath wrought out all his will.

Howbeit I now will ask thee to fulfill
One great return-gift—not so great withal
As I have given, for life is more than all;
But just and due, as thine own heart will tell.
For thou hast loved our little ones as well
As I have. . . . Keep them to be masters here
In my old house; and bring no stepmother
Upon them. She might hate them. She might be

Some baser woman, not a queen like me,
 And strike them with her hand. For mercy, spare
 Our little ones that wrong. It is my prayer. . . .
 They come into a house: they are all strife
 And hate to any child of the dead wife. . . .
 Better a serpent than a stepmother!

A boy is safe. He has his father there
 To guard him. But a little girl! (*Taking the*
LITTLE GIRL to her) What good
 And gentle care will guide thy maidenhood?
 What woman wilt thou find at father's side?
 One evil word from her, just when the tide
 Of youth is full, would wreck thy hope of love.
 And no more mother near, to stand above
 Thy marriage-bed, nor comfort thee pain-tossed
 In travail, when one needs a mother most!
 Seeing I must die. . . . 'Tis here, across my way,
 Not for the morrow, not for the third day,
 But now—Death, and to lie with things that were.
 Farewell. God keep you happy.—Husband dear,
 Remember that I failed thee not; and you,
 My children, that your mother loved you true.

LEADER.

Take comfort. Ere thy lord can speak, I swear,
 If truth is in him, he will grant thy prayer.

ADMETUS.

He will, he will! Oh, never fear for me.
 Mine hast thou been, and mine shalt ever be,
 Living and dead, thou only. None in wide
 Hellas but thou shalt be Admetus' bride.
 No race so high, no face so magic-sweet

Shall ever from this purpose turn my feet.
And children . . . if God grant me joy of these,
'Tis all I ask; of thee no joy nor ease
He gave me. And thy mourning I will bear
Not one year of my life but every year,
While life shall last. . . . My mother I will know
No more. My father shall be held my foe.
They brought the words of love but not the deed,
While thou hast given thine all, and in my need
Saved me. What can I do but weep alone,
Alone alway, when such a wife is gone? . . .

An end shall be of revel, and an end
Of crowns and song and mirth of friend with friend,
Wherewith my house was glad. I ne'er again
Will touch the lute nor ease my heart from pain
With pipes of Afric. All the joys I knew,
And joys were many, thou hast broken in two.
Oh, I will find some artist wondrous wise
Shall mould for me thy shape, thine hair, thine eyes,
And lay it in thy bed; and I will lie
Close, and reach out mine arms to thee, and cry
Thy name into the night, and wait and hear
My own heart breathe: "Thy love, thy love is
near."

A cold delight; yet it might ease the sum
Of sorrow. . . . And good dreams of thee will come
Like balm. 'Tis sweet, even in a dream, to gaze
On a dear face, the moment that it stays.

O God, if Orpheus' voice were mine, to sing
To Death's high Virgin and the Virgin's King,
Till their hearts failed them, down would I my path
Cleave, and naught stay me, not the Hound of Wrath,
Not the grey oarsman of the ghostly tide,

Till back to sunlight I had borne my bride.

But now, wife, wait for me till I shall come
Where thou art, and prepare our second home.
These ministers in that same cedar sweet
Where thou art laid will lay me, feet to feet,
And head to head, oh, not in death from thee
Divided, who alone art true to me!

LEADER.

This life-long sorrow thou hast sworn, I too,
Thy friend, will bear with thee. It is her due.

ALCESTIS.

Children, ye heard his promise? He will wed
No other woman nor forget the dead.

ADMETUS.

Again I promise. So it shall be done.

ALCESTIS (*giving the children into his arms
one after the other*).

On that oath take my daughter: and my son.

ADMETUS.

Dear hand that gives, I accept both gift and vow.

ALCESTIS.

Thou, in my place, must be their mother now.

ADMETUS.

Else were they motherless—I needs must try.

ALCESTIS.

My babes, I ought to live, and lo, I die.

ADMETUS.

And how can I, forlorn of thee, live on?

ALCESTIS.

Time healeth; and the dead are dead and gone.

ADMETUS.

Oh, take me with thee to the dark below,
Me also!

ALCESTIS.

'Tis enough that one should go.

ADMETUS.

O Fate, to have cheated me of one so true!

ALCESTIS (*her strength failing*).

There comes a darkness: a great burden, too.

ADMETUS.

I am lost if thou wilt leave me. . . . Wife! Mine
own!

ALCESTIS.

I am not thy wife; I am nothing. All is gone.

ADMETUS.

Thy babes! Thou wilt not leave them.—Raise thine
eye.

ALCESTIS

ALCESTIS.

I am sorry. . . . But good-bye, children; good-bye.

ADMETUS.

Look at them! Wake and look at them!

ALCESTIS.

I must go.

ADMETUS.

What? Dying!

ALCESTIS.

Farewell, husband! [She dies.

ADMETUS (*with a cry*).

Ah! . . . Woe, woe!

LEADER.

Admetus' Queen is dead!

[*While ADMETUS is weeping silently, and the*

CHORUS *veil their faces, the* LITTLE BOY

runs up to his dead Mother.

LITTLE BOY.

Oh, what has happened? Mummy has gone away,

And left me and will not come back any more!

Father, I shall be lonely all the day. . . .

Look! Look! Her eyes . . . and her arms not like
before,

How they lie . . .

Mother! Oh, speak a word!
Answer me, answer me, Mother! It is I.
I am touching your face. It is I, your little bird.

ADMETUS (*recovering himself and going to the Child*).

She hears us not, she sees us not. We lie
Under a heavy grief, child, thou and I.

LITTLE BOY.

I am so little, Father, and lonely and cold
Here without Mother. It is too hard. . . . And
you,
Poor little sister, too.
Oh, Father!
Such a little time we had her. She might have stayed
On till we all were old. . . .
Everything is spoiled when Mother is dead.
[*The LITTLE BOY is taken away, with his
Sister, sobbing.*]

LEADER.

My King, thou needs must gird thee to the worst.
Thou shalt not be the last, nor yet the first,
To lose a noble wife. Be brave, and know
To die is but a debt that all men owe.

ADMETUS.

I know. It came not without doubts and fears,
This thing. The thought hath poisoned all my
years.
Howbeit, I now will make the burial due
To this dead Queen. Be assembled, all of you;

And, after, raise your triumph-song to greet
This pitiless Power that yawns beneath our feet.

Meantime let all in Thessaly who dread
My sceptre join in mourning for the dead
With temples sorrow-shorn and sable weed.
Ye chariot-lords, ye spurrers of the steed,
Shear close your horses' manes! Let there be found
Through all my realm no lute, nor lyre, nor sound
Of piping, till twelve moons are at an end.
For never shall I lose a closer friend,
Nor braver in my need. And worthy is she
Of honour, who alone hath died for me.

[*The body of ALCESTIS is carried into the house
by mourners; ADMETUS follows it.*]

CHORUS.

Daughter of Pelias, fare thee well,
May joy be thine in the Sunless Houses!
For thine is a deed which the Dead shall tell
Where a King black-browed in the gloom carouses;
And the cold grey hand at the helm and oar
Which guideth shadows from shore to shore,
Shall bear this day o'er the Tears that Well,
A Queen of women, a spouse of spouses.

Minstrels many shall praise thy name
With lyre full-strung and with voices lyreless,
When Mid-Moon riseth, an orbèd flame,
And from dusk to dawning the dance is tireless;
And Carnos cometh to Sparta's call,
And Athens shineth in festival;
For thy death is a song, and a fullness of fame,
Till the heart of the singer is left desireless.

LEADER.

Would I could reach thee, oh,
Reach thee and save, my daughter,
Starward from gulfs of Hell,
Past gates, past tears that swell,
Where the weak oar climbs thro'
The night and the water!

SECOND ELDER.

Belovèd and lonely one,
Who feared not dying:
Gone in another's stead
Alone to the hungry dead:
Light be the carven stone
Above thee lying!

THIRD ELDER.

Oh, he who should seek again
A new bride after thee,
Were loathed of thy children twain,
And loathed of me.

LEADER.

Word to his mother sped,
Praying to her who bore him;
Word to his father, old,
Heavy with years and cold;
"Quick, ere your son be dead!
What dare ye for him?"

SECOND ELDER.

Old, and they dared not; grey,
And they helped him never!

'Twas she, in her youth and pride,
Rose up for her lord and died.
Oh, love of two hearts that stay
One-knit for ever. . . .

THIRD ELDER.

'Tis rare in the world! God send
Such bride in my house to be;
She should live life to the end,
Not fail through me.

*[As the song ceases there enters a stranger,
walking strongly, but travel-stained,
dusty, and tired. His lion-skin and club
show him to be HERACLES.]*

HERACLES.

Ho, countrymen! To Pherae am I come
By now? And is Admetus in his home?

LEADER.

Our King is in his house, Lord Heracles.—
But say, what need brings thee in days like these
To Thessaly and Pherae's wallèd ring?

HERACLES.

A quest I follow for the Argive King.

LEADER.

What prize doth call thee, and to what far place?

HERACLES.

The horses of one Diomedes, in Thrace.

LEADER.

But how . . . ? Thou know'st not ? Is he strange to thee ?

HERACLES.

Quite strange. I ne'er set foot in Bistony.

LEADER.

Not without battle shalt thou win those steeds.

HERACLES.

So be it ! I cannot fail my master's needs.

LEADER.

'Tis slay or die, win or return no more.

HERACLES.

Well, I have looked on peril's face before.

LEADER.

What profit hast thou in such manslaying ?

HERACLES.

I shall bring back the horses to my King.

LEADER.

'Twere none such easy work to bridle them.

HERACLES.

Not easy ? Have they nostrils breathing flame ?

LEADER.

They tear men's flesh ; their jaws are swift with blood.

ALCESTIS

HERACLES.

Men's flesh! 'Tis mountain wolves', not horses' food!

LEADER.

Thou wilt see their mangers clogged with blood, like
mire.

HERACLES.

And he who feeds such beasts, who was his sire?

LEADER.

Arês, the war-lord of the Golden Targe.

HERACLES.

Enough!—This labour fitteth well my large
Fortune, still upward, still against the wind.
How often with these kings of Arês' kind
Must I do battle? First the dark wolf-man,
Lycæon; then 'twas he men called The Swan;
And now this man of steeds! . . . Well, none shall
see
Alcmena's son turn from his enemy.

LEADER.

Lo, as we speak, this land's high governor,
Admetus, cometh from his castle door.

Enter ADMETUS from the Castle.

ADMETUS.

Zeus-born of Perseid line, all joy to thee!

HERACLES.

Joy to Admetus, Lord of Thessaly!

ADMETUS.

Right welcome were she!—But thy love I know.

HERACLES.

But why this mourning hair, this garb of woe?

ADMETUS (*in a comparatively light tone*).

There is a burial I must make to-day.

HERACLES.

God keep all evil from thy children!

ADMETUS.

My children live. Nay,

HERACLES.

Thy father, if 'tis he,
Is ripe in years.

ADMETUS.

He liveth, friend, and she
Who bore me.

HERACLES.

Surely not thy wife? 'Tis not
Alcestis?

ADMETUS (*his composure a little shaken*).

Ah; two answers share my thought,
Questioned of her.

ALCESTIS

HERACLES.

Is she alive or dead?

ADMETUS.

She is, and is not; and my heart hath bled
Long years for her.

HERACLES.

I understand no more.

Thy words are riddles.

ADMETUS.

Heard'st thou not of yore
The doom that she must meet?

HERACLES.

I know thy wife

Has sworn to die for thee.

ADMETUS.

And is it life,
To live with such an oath hung o'er her head?

HERACLES (*relieved*).

Ah,

Weep not too soon, friend. Wait till she be dead.

ADMETUS.

He dies who is doomed to die; he is dead who dies.

HERACLES.

The two are different things in most men's eyes.

ADMETUS.

Decide thy way, lord, and let me decide
The other way.

HERACLES.

Who is it that has died?
Thou weapest.

ADMETUS.

'Tis a woman. It doth take
My memory back to her of whom we spake.

HERACLES.

A stranger, or of kin to thee?

ADMETUS.

Not kin,
But much beloved.

HERACLES.

How came she to be in
Thy house to die?

ADMETUS.

Her father died, and so
She came to us, an orphan, long ago.

HERACLES (*as though about to depart*).

'Tis sad.
I would I had found thee on a happier day.

ALCESTIS

ADMETUS.

Thy words have some intent: what wouldst thou say?

HERACLES.

I must find harbour with some other friend.

ADMETUS.

My prince, it may not be! God never send
Such evil!

HERACLES.

'Tis great turmoil, when a guest
Comes to a mourning house.

ADMETUS.

Come in and rest.

Let the dead die!

HERACLES.

I cannot, for mere shame,
Feast beside men whose eyes have tears in them.

ADMETUS.

The guest-rooms are apart where thou shalt be.

HERACLES.

Friend, let me go. I shall go gratefully.

ADMETUS.

Thou shalt not enter any door but mine.

(*To an Attendant*) Lead in our guest. Unlock the
furthest line

Of guest-chambers; and bid the stewards there
Make ready a full feast; then close with care
The midway doors. 'Tis unmeet, if he hears
Our turmoil or is burdened with our tears.

[*The Attendant leads HERACLES into the house.*]

LEADER.

How, master? When within a thing so sad
Lies, thou wilt house a stranger? Art thou mad?

ADMETUS.

And had I turned the stranger from my door,
Who sought my shelter, hadst thou praised me more?
I trow not, if my sorrow were thereby
No whit less, only the more friendless I.
And more, when bards tell tales, were it not worse
My house should lie beneath the stranger's curse?
Now he is my sure friend, if e'er I stand
Lonely in Argos, in a thirsty land.

LEADER.

Thou callest him thy friend; how didst thou dare
Keep hid from him the burden of thy care?

ADMETUS.

He never would have entered, had he known
My grief.—Aye, men may mock what I have done,

And call me fool. My house hath never learned
To fail its friend, nor seen the stranger spurned.

[ADMETUS *goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

Oh, a House that loves the stranger,
And a House for ever free!
And Apollo, the Song-changer,
Was a herdsman in thy fee;
Yea, a-piping he was found,
Where the upward valleys wound,
To the kine from out the manger
And the sheep from off the lea,
And love was upon Othrys at the sound.

And from deep glens unbeholden
Of the forest to his song
There came lynxes streaky-golden,
There came lions in a throng,
Tawny-coated, ruddy-eyed,
To that piper in his pride;
And shy fawns he would embolden,
Dappled dancers, out along
The shadow by the pine-tree's side.

And those magic pipes a-blowing
Have fulfilled thee in thy reign
By thy Lake with honey flowing,
By thy sheepfolds and thy grain;
Where the Sun turns his steeds
To the twilight, all the meads
Of Molossus know thy sowing
And thy ploughs upon the plain.

Yea, and eastward thou art free.
To the portals of the sea,
And Pelion, the unharboured, is but minister to thee.

He hath opened wide his dwelling
To the stranger, though his ruth
For the dead was fresh and welling,
For the loved one of his youth.

'Tis the brave heart's cry:

"I will fail not, though I die!"

Doth it win, with no man's telling,
Some high vision of the truth?

We may marvel. Yet I trust,

When man seeketh to be just

And to pity them that wander, God will raise him
from the dust.

*[As the song ceases the doors are thrown open
and ADMETUS comes before them: a great
funeral procession is seen moving out.]*

ADMETUS.

Most gentle citizens, our dead is here
Made ready; and these youths to bear the bier
Uplifted to the grave-mound and the urn.
Now, seeing she goes forth never to return,
Bid her your last farewell, as mourners may.

[The procession moves forward past him.]

LEADER.

Nay, lord; thy father, walking old and grey;
And followers bearing burial gifts and brave
Gauds, which men call the comfort of the grave.

Enter PHERÊS with followers bearing robes and gifts.

PHERES.

I come in sorrow for thy sorrow, son.
A faithful wife indeed thou hast lost, and one
Who ruled her heart. But, howso hard they be,
We needs must bear these griefs.—Some gifts for thee
Are here. . . . Yes; take them. Let them go beneath

The sod. We both must honour her in death,
Seeing she hath died, my son, that thou mayst live
Nor I be childless. Aye, she would not give
My soul to a sad old age, mourning for thee.
Methinks she hath made all women's life to be
A nobler thing, by one great woman's deed.

Thou saviour of my son, thou staff in need
To our wrecked age, farewell! May some good life
Be thine still in the grave.—Oh, 'tis a wife
Like this man needs; else let him stay unwed!

*[The old man has not noticed ADMETUS'S
gathering indignation.]*

ADMETUS.

I called not thee to burial of my dead,
Nor count thy presence here a welcome thing.
My wife shall wear no robe that thou canst bring,
Nor needs thy help in aught. There was a day
We craved thy love, when I was on my way
Deathward—thy love, which bade thee stand aside
And watch, grey-bearded, while a young man died!
And now wilt mourn for her? Thy fatherhood!
Thou wast no true begetter of my blood,

Nor she my mother who dares call me child.
Oh, she was barren ever; she beguiled
Thy folly with some bastard of a thrall.
Here is thy proof! This hour hath shown me all
Thou art; and now I am no more thy son.

'Fore God, among all cowards can scarce be one
Like thee. So grey, so near the boundary
Of mortal life, thou wouldst not, durst not, die
To save thy son! Thou hast suffered her to do
Thine office, her, no kin to me nor you,
Yet more than kin! Henceforth she hath all the part
Of mother, yea, and father in my heart.

And what a glory had been thine that day,
Dying to save thy son—when, either way,
Thy time must needs be brief. Thy life has had
Abundance of the things that make men glad;
A crown that came to thee in youth; a son
To do thee worship and maintain thy throne—
Not like a childless king, whose folk and lands
Lie helpless, to be torn by strangers' hands.

Wilt say I failed in duty to thine age;
For that thou hast let me die? Not so; most sage,
Most pious I was, to mother and to thee;
And thus ye have paid me! Well, I counsel ye,
Lose no more time. Get quick another son
To foster thy last years, to lay thee on
Thy bier, when dead, and wrap thee in thy pall.
I will not bury thee. I am, for all
The care thou hast shown me, dead. If I have found
Another, true to save me at the bound
Of life and death, that other's child am I,
That other's fostering friend, until I die.

How falsely do these old men pray for death,

Cursing their weight of years, their weary breath!
When Death comes close, there is not one that dares
To die; age is forgot and all its cares.

LEADER.

Oh, peace! Enough of sorrow in our path
Is strewn. Thou son, stir not thy father's wrath.

PHERES.

My son, whom seekest thou . . . some Lydian thrall,
Or Phrygian, bought with cash? . . . to affright
withal

By cursing? I am a Thessalian, free,
My father a born chief of Thessaly;
And thou most insolent. Yet think not so
To fling thy loud lewd words at me and go.

I got thee to succeed me in my hall,
I have fed thee, clad thee. But I have no call
To die for thee. Not in our family,
Not in all Greece, doth law bid fathers die
To save their sons. Thy road of life is thine
None other's, to rejoice at or repine.
All that was owed to thee by us is paid.
My throne is thine. My broad lands shall be made
Thine, as I had them from my father. . . . Say,
How have I wronged thee? What have I kept away?
"Not died for thee?" . . . I ask not thee to die.

Thou lovest this light: shall I not love it, I? . . .
'Tis age on age there, in the dark; and here
My sunlit time is short, but dear; but dear.

Thou hast fought hard enough. Thou drawest
breath

Even now, long past thy portioned hour of death,
By murdering her . . . and blamest my faint heart,
Coward, who hast let a woman play thy part
And die to save her pretty soldier! Aye,
A good plan, surely! Thou needst never die;
Thou canst find alway somewhere some fond wife
To die for thee. But, prithee, make not strife
With other friends, who will not save thee so.
Be silent, loving thine own life, and know
All men love theirs! . . . Taunt others, and thou too
Shalt hear much that is bitter, and is true.

LEADER.

Too much of wrath before, too much hath run
After. Old man, cease to revile thy son.

ADMETUS.

Speak on. I have spoken. . . . If my truth of tongue
Gives pain to thee, why didst thou do me wrong?

PHERES.

Wrong? To have died for thee were far more wrong.

ADMETUS.

How can an old life weigh against a young?

PHERES.

Man hath but one, not two lives, to his use.

ADMETUS.

Oh, live on; live, and grow more old than Zeus!

ALCESTIS

PHERES.

Because none wrongs thee, thou must curse thy sire?

ADMETUS.

I blest him. Is not life his one desire?

PHERES.

This dead, methinks, is lying in *thy* place.

ADMETUS.

A proof, old traitor, of thy cowardliness!

PHERES.

Died she through me? . . . That thou wilt hardly say.

ADMETUS (*almost breaking down*).

O God!

Mayst thou but feel the need of me some day!

PHERES.

Go forward; woo more wives that more may die.

ADMETUS.

As thou wouldst not! Thine is the infamy.

PHERES.

This light of heaven is sweet, and sweet again.

ADMETUS.

Thy heart is foul. A thing unmeet for men.

PHERES.

Thou laugh'st not yet across the old man's tomb.

ADMETUS.

Dishonoured thou shalt die when death shall come.

PHERES.

Once dead, I shall not care what tales are told.

ADMETUS.

Great Gods, so lost to honour and so old!

PHERES.

She was not lost to honour: she was blind.

ADMETUS.

Go! Leave me with my dead. . . . Out from my
mind!

PHERES.

I go. Bury the woman thou hast slain. . . .
Her kinsmen yet may come to thee with plain
Question. Acastus hath small place in good
Men, if he care not for his sister's blood.

[PHERES goes off, with his Attendants. AD-
METUS calls after him as he goes.

ADMETUS.

Begone, begone, thou and thy bitter mate!
Be old and childless—ye have earned your fate—
While your son lives! For never shall ye be
From henceforth under the same roof with me. . . .

Must I send heralds and a trumpet's call
To abjure thy blood? Fear not, I will send them
all. . . .

[*PHERES is now out of sight; ADMETUS drops
his defiance and seems like a broken man.*

But we—our sorrow is upon us; come
With me, and let us bear her to the tomb.

CHORUS.

Ah me!

Farewell, unfalteringly brave!

Farewell, thou generous heart and true!

May Pluto give thee welcome due,
And Hermes love thee in the grave.

Whate'er of blessèd life there be
For high souls to the darkness flown,
Be thine for ever, and a throne
Beside the crowned Persephonê.

[*The funeral procession has formed and moves
slowly out, followed by ADMETUS and the
CHORUS. The stage is left empty, till
a side door of the Castle opens and there
comes out a SERVANT, angry and almost
in tears.*

SERVANT.

Full many a stranger and from many a land
Hath lodged in this old castle, and my hand
Served them; but never has there passed this way
A scurvier ruffian than our guest to-day.
He saw my master's grief, but all the more

In he must come, and shoulders through the door.
 And after, think you he would mannerly
 Take what was set before him? No, not he!
 If, on this day of trouble, we left out
 Some small thing, he must have it with a shout.
 Up, in both hands, our vat of ivy-wood
 He raised, and drank the dark grape's burning blood,
 Strong and untempered, till the fire was red
 Within him; then put myrtle round his head
 And roared some noisy song. So had we there
 Discordant music. He, without a care
 For all the affliction of Admetus' halls,
 Sang on; and, listening, one could hear the thralls
 In the long gallery weeping for the dead.

We let him see no tears. Our master made
 That order, that the stranger must not know.

So here I wait in her own house, and do
 Service to some black thief, some man of prey;
 And she has gone, has gone for ever away.
 I never followed her, nor lifted high
 My hand to bless her; never said good-bye. . . .
 I loved her like my mother. So did all
 The slaves. She never let his anger fall
 Too hard. She saved us alway. . . . And this wild
 beast

Comes in our sorrow when we need him least!

[During the last few lines HERACLES has entered, unperceived by the SERVANT. He has evidently bathed and changed his garments and drunk his fill, and is now revelling, a garland of flowers on his head. He frightens the SERVANT a little from time to time during the following speech.]

HERACLES.

Friend, why so solemn and so cranky-eyed?
 'Tis not a henchman's office, to show pride
 To his betters. He should smile and make good
 cheer.

There comes a guest, thy lord's old comrade, here;
 And thou art all knitted eyebrows, scowls and head
 Bent, because somebody, forsooth, is dead!

Come close! I mean to make thee wiser.

[*The SERVANT reluctantly comes close.*

So.

Dost comprehend things mortal, how they grow? . . .
 (*To himself*) I suppose not. How could he? . . .

Look this way!

Death is a debt all mortal men must pay;
 Aye, there is no man living who can say
 If life will last him yet a single day.
 On, to the dark, drives Fortune; and no force
 Can wrest her secret nor put back her course. . . .

I have told thee now. I have taught thee. After
 this

Eat, drink, make thyself merry. Count the bliss
 Of the one passing hour thine own; the rest
 Is Fortune's. And give honour chiefliest
 To our lady Cypris, giver of all joys
 To man. 'Tis a sweet goddess. Otherwise,
 Let all these questions sleep and just obey
 My counsel. . . . Thou believest all I say?
 I hope so. . . . Let this stupid grieving be;
 Rise up above thy troubles, and with me
 Drink in a cloud of blossoms. By my soul,
 I vow the sweet splash-music of the bowl
 Will break thy glumness, loose thee from the frown

Within. Let mortal man keep to his own
Mortality, and not expect too much.

To all your solemn dogs and other such
Scowlers—I tell thee truth, no more nor less—
Life is not life, but just unhappiness.

*[He offers the wine-bowl to the SERVANT, who
avoids it.]*

SERVANT.

We know all this. But now our fortunes be
Not such as ask for mirth or revelry.

HERACLES.

A woman dead, of no one's kin; why grieve
So much? Thy master and thy mistress live.

SERVANT.

Live? Man, hast thou heard nothing of our woe?

HERACLES.

Yes, thy lord told me all I need to know.

SERVANT.

He is too kind to his guests, more kind than wise.

HERACLES.

Must I go starved because some stranger dies?

SERVANT.

Some stranger?—Yes, a stranger verily!

HERACLES (*his manner beginning to change*).

Is this some real grief he hath hid from me?

SERVANT.

Go, drink, man! Leave to us our master's woes.

HERACLES.

It sounds not like a stranger. Yet, God knows . . .

SERVANT.

How should thy revelling hurt, if that were all?

HERACLES.

Hath mine own friend so wronged me in his hall?

SERVANT.

Thou camest at an hour when none was free
To accept thee. We were mourning. Thou canst
see
Our hair, black robes . . .

HERACLES (*suddenly, in a voice of thunder*).

Who is it that is dead?

SERVANT.

Alcestis, the King's wife.

HERACLES (*overcome*).

What hast thou said?

Alcestis? . . . And ye feasted me withal!

SERVANT.

He held it shame to turn thee from his hall.

HERACLES.

Shame! And when such a wondrous wife was gone!

SERVANT (*breaking into tears*).

Oh, all is gone, all lost, not she alone!

HERACLES.

I knew, I felt it, when I saw his tears,
And face, and shorn hair. But he won mine ears
With talk of the strange woman and her rite
Of burial. So in mine own heart's despite
I crossed his threshold and sat drinking—he
And I old friends!—in his calamity.
Drank, and sang songs, and revelled, my head hot
With wine and flowers! . . . And thou to tell me
not,
When all the house lay filled with sorrow, thou!
(*A pause; then suddenly*) Where lies the tomb?—
Where shall I find her now?

SERVANT (*frightened*).

Close by the straight Larissa road. The tall
White marble showeth from the castle wall.

HERACLES.

O heart, O hand, great doings have ye done
Of old: up now, and show them what a son
Took life that hour, when she of Tiryns' sod,
Electryon's daughter, mingled with her God!

I needs must save this woman from the shore
Of death and set her in her house once more,
Repaying Admetus' love. . . . This Death, this black
And wingèd Lord of corpses, I will track
Home. I shall surely find him by the grave
A-hungered, lapping the hot blood they gave
In sacrifice. An ambush: then, one spring,
One grip! These arms shall be a brazen ring,
With no escape, no rest, howe'er he whine
And curse his mauled ribs, till the Queen is mine!

Or if he escape me, if he come not there
To seek the blood of offering, I will fare
Down to the Houses without Light, and bring
To Her we name not and her nameless King
Strong prayers, until they yield to me and send
Alcestis home, to life and to my friend:
Who gave me shelter, drove me not away
In his great grief, but hid his evil day
Like a brave man, because he loved me well.
Is one in all this land more hospitable,
One in all Greece? I swear no man shall say
He hath cast his love upon a churl away!

*[He goes forth, just as he is, in the direction
of the grave. The SERVANT watches a
moment and goes back into the hall.]*

*[The stage is empty; then ADMETUS and the
CHORUS return.]*

ADMETUS.

Alas!

Bitter the homeward way,

Bitter to seek

A widowed house; ah me,

Where should I fly or stay,
Be dumb or speak?
Would I could cease to be!

Despair, despair!
My mother bore me under an evil star.
I envy them that are perished; my heart is there.
It dwells in the Sunless Houses, afar, afar.

I take no joy in looking upon the light;
No joy in the feel of the earth beneath my tread.
The Slayer hath taken his hostage; the Lord of the
Dead
Holdeth me sworn to taste no more delight.
[He throws himself on the ground in despair.]

CHORUS.

[Each member of the CHORUS speaks his line severally, as he passes ADMETUS, who is heard sobbing at the end of each line.]

- Advance, advance;
Till the house shall give thee cover.
- Thou hast borne heavy things
And meet for lamentation.
- Thou hast passed, hast passed,
Thro' the deepest of the River.
- Yet no help comes
To the sad and silent nation.
- And the face of thy belovèd, it shall meet thee
never, never!

ADMETUS.

Ye wrench my wounds asunder. Where
 Is grief like mine, whose wife is dead?
 My wife, whom would I ne'er had wed,
 Nor loved, nor held my house with her. . . .

Blessed are they who dare to dwell
 Unloved of woman! 'Tis but one
 Heart that they bleed with, and alone
 Can bear their one life's burden well.

No young shall wither at their side,
 No bridal room be swept by death. . . .
 Aye, better man should draw his breath
 For ever without child or bride.

CHORUS (*as before*).

— 'Tis Fate, 'tis Fate:
 She is strong and none shall break her.

— No end, no end,
 Wilt thou lay to lamentations?

— Endure and be still:
 Thy lamenting will not wake her.

— There be many before thee,
 Who have suffered and had patience.

— Though the face of Sorrow changeth, yet her hand
 is on all nations.

ADMETUS.

The garb of tears, the mourner's cry:
 Then the long ache when tears are past! . . .

Oh, why didst hinder me to cast
 This body to the dust and die

With her, the faithful and the brave?
Then not one lonely soul had fled,
But two great lovers, proudly dead,
Through the deep waters of the grave.

LEADER.

A friend I knew,
In whose house died a son,
Worthy of bitter rue,
His only one.
His head sank, yet he bare
Stilly his weight of care,
Though grey was in his hair
And life nigh done.

ADMETUS.

Ye shapes that front me, wall and gate,
How shall I enter in and dwell
Among ye, with all Fortune's spell
Dischanted? Aye, the change is great.

That day I strode with bridal song
Through lifted brands of Pelian pine;
A hand belovèd lay in mine;
And loud behind a revelling throng

Exalted me and her, the dead.
They called us young, high-hearted; told
How princes were our sires of old,
And how we loved and we must wed. . . .

For those high songs, lo, men that moan,
 And raiment black where once was white;
 Who guide me homeward in the night,
 On that waste bed to lie alone.

SECOND ELDER.

It breaks, like strife,
 Thy long peace, where no pain
 Had entered; yet is life,
 Sweet life, not slain.
 A wife dead; a dear chair
 Empty: is that so rare?
 Men live without despair
 Whose loves are ta'en.

ADMETUS (*erect and facing them*).

Behold, I count my wife's fate happier,
 Though all gainsay me, than mine own. To her
 Comes no more pain for ever; she hath rest
 And peace from all toil, and her name is blest.
 But I am one who hath no right to stay
 Alive on earth; one that hath lost his way
 In fate, and strays in dreams of life long past. . . .
 Friends, I have learned my lesson at the last.

I have my life. Here stands my house. But now
 How dare I enter in? Or, entered, how
 Go forth again? Go forth, when none is there
 To give me a parting word, and I to her? . . .

Where shall I turn for refuge? There within,
 The desert that remains where she hath been
 Will drive me forth, the bed, the empty seat
 She sat in; nay, the floor beneath my feet

Unswapt, the children crying at my knee
For mother; and the very thralls will be
In sobs for the dear mistress that is lost.

That is my home! If I go forth, a host
Of feasts and bridal dances, gatherings gay
Of women, will be there to fright me away
To loneliness. Mine eyes will never bear
The sight. 'They were her friends; they played with
her.

And always, always, men who hate my name
Will murmur: "This is he who lives in shame
Because he dared not die! He gave instead
The woman whom he loved, and so is fled
From death. He counts himself a man withal!
And seeing his parents died not at his call
He hates them, when himself he dared not die!"

Such mocking beside all my pain shall I
Endure. . . . What profit was it to live on,
Friend, with my grief kept and mine honour gone?

CHORUS.

I have sojourned in the Muse's land,
Have wandered with the wandering star,
Seeking for strength, and in my hand
Held all philosophies that are;
Yet nothing could I hear nor see
Stronger than That Which Needs Must Be.
No Orphic rune, no Thracian scroll,
Hath magic to avert the morrow;
No healing all those medicines brave
Apollo to the Asclepiad gave;
Pale herbs of comfort in the bowl
Of man's wide sorrow.

She hath no temple, she alone,
 Nor image where a man may kneel;
 No blood upon her altar-stone
 Crying shall make her hear nor feel.
 I know thy greatness; come not great
 Beyond my dreams, O Power of Fate!
 Aye, Zeus himself shall not uncloze
 His purpose save by thy discerning.
 The chain of iron, the Scythian sword,
 It yields and shivers at thy word;
 Thy heart is as the rock, and knows
 No ruth, nor turning.

[They turn to ADMETUS.]

Her hand hath caught thee; yea, the keeping
 Of iron fingers grips thee round.
 Be still. Be still. Thy noise of weeping
 Shall raise no lost one from the ground.
 Nay, even the Sons of God are parted
 At last from joy, and pine in death. . . .
 Oh, dear on earth when all did love her,
 Oh, dearer lost beyond recover:
 Of women all the bravest-hearted
 Hath pressed thy lips and breathed thy breath.

Let not the earth that lies upon her
 Be deemed a grave-mound of the dead.
 Let honour, as the Gods have honour,
 Be hers, till men shall bow the head,
 And strangers, climbing from the city
 Her slanting path, shall muse and say:
 "This woman died to save her lover,
 And liveth blest, the stars above her:
 Hail, Holy One, and grant thy pity!"
 So pass the wondering words away.

LEADER.

But see, it is Alcmena's son once more,
My lord King, cometh striding to thy door.

[Enter HERACLES; his dress is as in the last scene, but shows signs of a struggle. Behind come two Attendants, guiding between them a veiled Woman, who seems like one asleep or unconscious. The Woman remains in the background while HERACLES comes forward.]

HERACLES.

Thou art my friend, Admetus; therefore bold
And plain I tell my story, and withhold
No secret hurt.—Was I not worthy, friend,
To stand beside thee; yea, and to the end
Be proven in sorrow if I was true to thee?
And thou didst tell me not a word, while she
Lay dead within; but bid me feast, as though
Naught but the draping of some stranger's woe
Was on thee. So I garlanded my brow
And poured the gods drink-offering, and but now
Filled thy death-stricken house with wine and song.
Thou hast done me wrong, my brother; a great wrong
Thou hast done me. But I will not add more pain
In thine affliction.

Why I am here again,
Returning, thou must hear. I pray thee, take
And keep yon woman for me till I make
My homeward way from Thrace, when I have ta'en
Those four steeds and their bloody master slain.
And if—which heaven avert!—I ne'er should see

Hellas again, I leave her here, to be
An handmaid in thy house. No labour small
Was it that brought her to my hand at all.
I fell upon a contest certain Kings
Had set for all mankind, sore buffetings
And meet for strong men, where I staked my life
And won this woman. For the easier strife
Black steeds were prizes; herds of kine were cast
For heavier issues, fists and wrestling; last,
This woman. . . . Lest my work should all seem done
For naught, I needs must keep what I have won;
So prithee take her in. No theft, but true
Toil, won her. . . . Some day thou mayst thank me,
too.

ADMETUS.

'Twas in no scorn, no bitterness to thee,
I hid my wife's death and my misery.
Methought it was but added pain on pain
If thou shouldst leave me, and roam forth again
Seeking another's roof. And, for mine own
Sorrow, I was content to weep alone.

But, for this damsel, if it may be so,
I pray thee, Lord, let some man, not in woe
Like mine, take her. Thou hast in Thessaly
Abundant friends. . . . 'Twould wake sad thoughts
in me.

How could I have this damsel in my sight
And keep mine eyes dry? Prince, why wilt thou
smite

The smitten? Griefs enough are on my head.

Where in my castle could so young a maid
Be lodged—her veil and raiment show her young:

Here, in the men's hall? I should fear some wrong.
 'Tis not so easy, Prince, to keep controlled
 My young men. And thy charge I fain would hold
 Sacred.—If not, wouldst have me keep her in
 The women's chambers . . . where my dead hath
 been?

How could I lay this woman where my bride
 Once lay? It were dishonour double-dyed.
 These streets would curse the man who so betrayed
 The wife who saved him for some younger maid;
 The dead herself . . . I needs must worship her
 And keep her will.

*[During the last few lines ADMETUS has been
 looking at the veiled Woman and, though
 he does not consciously recognize her, feels
 a strange emotion overmastering him.
 He draws back.]*

Aye. I must walk with care. . . .
 O woman, whosoe'er thou art, thou hast
 The shape of my Alcestis; thou art cast
 In mould like hers. . . . Oh, take her from mine
 eyes!
 In God's name!

*[HERACLES signs to the Attendants to take
 ALCESTIS away again. She stays veiled
 and unnoticing in the background.]*

I was fallen, and in this wise
 Thou wilt make me deeper fall. . . . Meseems, me-
 seems,

There in her face the loved one of my dreams
Looked forth.—My heart is made a turbid thing,
Craving I know not what, and my tears spring
Unbidden.—Grief I knew 'twould be; but how
Fiery a grief I never knew till now.

LEADER.

Thy fate I praise not. Yet, what gift soe'er
God giveth, man must steel himself and bear.

HERACLES (*drawing ADMETUS on*).

Would God, I had the power, 'mid all this might
Of arm, to break the dungeons of the night,
And free thy wife, and make thee glad again!

ADMETUS.

Where is such power? I know thy heart were fain;
But so 'tis writ. The dead shall never rise.

HERACLES.

Chafe not the curb, then: suffer and be wise.

ADMETUS.

Easier to give such counsel than to keep.

HERACLES.

Who will be happier, shouldst thou always weep?

ADMETUS.

Why, none. Yet some blind longing draws me
on . . .

HERACLES.

'Tis natural. Thou didst love her that is gone.

ADMETUS.

'Tis that hath wrecked, oh more than wrecked, my
life.

HERACLES.

'Tis certain: thou hast lost a faithful wife.

ADMETUS.

Till life itself is dead and wearies me.

HERACLES.

Thy pain is yet young. Time will soften thee.

*[The veiled Woman begins dimly, as though in
a dream, to hear the words spoken.]*

ADMETUS.

Time? Yes, if time be death.

HERACLES.

Nay, wait; and some
Woman, some new desire of love, will come.

ADMETUS (*indignantly*).

Peace!

How canst thou? Shame upon thee!

HERACLES.

Thou wilt stay
Unwed for ever, lonely night and day?

ADMETUS.

No other bride in these void arms shall lie.

HERACLES.

What profit will thy dead wife gain thereby?

ADMETUS.

Honour; which finds her wheresoe'er she lies.

HERACLES.

Most honourable in thee: but scarcely wise!

ADMETUS.

God curse me, if I betray her in her tomb!

HERACLES.

So be it! . . .

And this good damsel, thou wilt take her home?

ADMETUS.

No, in the name of Zeus, thy father! No!

HERACLES.

I swear, 'tis not well to reject her so.

ADMETUS.

'Twould tear my heart to accept her.

HERACLES.

Grant me, friend,
This one boon! It may help thee in the end.

ADMETUS.

Woe's me!
Would God thou hadst never won those victories!

HERACLES.

Thou sharest both the victory and the prize.

ADMETUS.

Thou art generous. . . . But now let her go.

HERACLES.

She shall,

If go she must. Look first, and judge withal.
[*He takes the veil off* ALCESTIS.

ADMETUS (*steadily refusing to look*).

She must.—And thou, forgive me!

HERACLES.

Friend, there is

A secret reason why I pray for this.

ADMETUS (*surprised, then reluctantly yielding*).

I grant thy boon then—though it likes me ill.

HERACLES.

'Twill like thee later. Now . . . but do my will.

ADMETUS (*beckoning to an Attendant*).

Take her; find her some lodging in my hall.

HERACLES.

I will not yield this maid to any thrall.

ADMETUS.

Take her thyself and lead her in.

HERACLES.

I stand
Beside her; take her; lead her to thy hand.

[He brings the Woman close to ADMETUS, who looks determinedly away. She reaches out her arms.]

ADMETUS.

I touch her not.—Let her go in!

HERACLES.

I am loth
To trust her save to thy pledged hand and oath.

[He lays his hand on ADMETUS'S shoulder.]

ADMETUS (*desperately*).

Lord, this is violence . . . wrong . . .

HERACLES.

Reach forth thine hand
And touch this comer from a distant land.

ADMETUS (*holding out his hand without looking*).
Like Perseus when he touched the Gorgon, there!

HERACLES.

Thou hast touched her?

ADMETUS (*at last taking her hand*).

Touched her? . . . Yes.

HERACLES (*a hand on the shoulder of each*).

Then cling to her;

And say if thou hast found a guest of grace

In God's son, Heracles! Look in her face;

Look; is she like . . . ?

[ADMETUS *looks and stands amazed*.

Go, and forget in bliss

Thy sorrow!

ADMETUS.

O ye Gods! What meaneth this?

A marvel beyond dreams! The face . . . 'tis she;

Mine, verily mine! Or doth God mock at me

And blast my vision with some mad surmise?

HERACLES.

Not so. This is thy wife before thine eyes.

ADMETUS (*who has recoiled in his amazement*).

Beware! The dead have phantoms that they send . . .

HERACLES.

Nay; no ghost-raiser hast thou made thy friend.

ADMETUS.

My wife . . . she whom I buried?

HERACLES.

I deceive
Thee not; nor wonder thou canst scarce believe.

ADMETUS.

And dare I touch her, greet her, as mine own
Wife living?

HERACLES.

Greet her. Thy desire is won.

ADMETUS (*approaching with awe*).

Belovèd eyes; belovèd form; O thou
Gone beyond hope, I have thee, I hold thee now?

HERACLES.

Thou hast her: may no god begrudge your joy.

ADMETUS (*turning to HERACLES*).

O lordly conqueror, Child of Zeus on high,
Be blessèd! And may He, thy sire above,
Save thee, as thou alone hast saved my love!
[*He kneels to HERACLES, who raises him.*
But how . . . how didst thou win her to the light?

HERACLES.

I fought for life with Him I needs must fight.

ADMETUS.

With Death thou hast fought! But where?

HERACLES.

Among his dead
I lay, and sprang and gripped him as he fled.

ADMETUS (*in an awed whisper, looking towards*
ALCESTIS).

Why standeth she so still? No sound, no word!

HERACLES.

She hath dwelt with Death. Her voice may not be
heard

Ere to the Lords of Them Below she pay
Due cleansing, and awake on the third day.

(*To the Attendants*) So; guide her home.

[*They lead ALCESTIS to the doorway.*

And thou, King, for the rest
Of time, be true; be righteous to thy guest,
As he would have thee be. But now farewell!
My task yet lies before me, and the spell
That binds me to my master; forth I fare.

ADMETUS.

Stay with us this one day! Stay but to share
The feast upon our hearth!

HERACLES.

The feasting day
Shall surely come; now I must needs away.

[HERACLES *departs.*

ADMETUS.

Farewell! All victory attend thy name
And safe home-coming!

Lo, I make proclaim
 To the Four Nations and all Thessaly;
 A wondrous happiness hath come to be:
 Therefore pray, dance, give offerings and make full
 Your altars with the life-blood of the Bull!
 For me . . . my heart is changed; my life shall
 mend
 Henceforth. For surely Fortune is a friend.
 [*He goes with ALCESTIS into the house.*]

CHORUS.

There be many shapes of mystery;
 And many things God brings to be,
 Past hope or fear.
 And the end men looked for cometh not,
 And a path is there where no man thought.
 So hath it fallen here.

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P. 3, Prologue. Asclêpios (Latin Aesculapius), son of Apollo, the hero-physician, by his miraculous skill healed the dead. This transgressed the divine law, so Zeus slew him. (The particular dead man raised by him was Hippolytus, who came to life in Italy under the name of Virbius, and was worshipped with Artemis at Aricia.) Apollo in revenge, not presuming to attack Zeus himself, killed the Cyclôpes, and was punished by being exiled from heaven and made servant to a mortal. There are several such stories of gods made servants to human beings.

P. 3, l. 12, Beguiling.]—See Preface. In the original story he made them drunk with wine. (Aesch. *Eumenides*, 728.) As the allusion would doubtless be clear to the Greek audience, I have added a mention of wine which is not in the Greek. Libations to the Elder Gods, such as the Fates and Eumenides, had to be “wineless.” Historically this probably means that the worship dates from a time before wine was used in Greece.

P. 4, l. 22, The stain of death must not come nigh My radiance.]—Compare Artemis in the last scene of the *Hippolytus*. The presence of a dead body would be a pollution to Apollo, though that of Thánatos (Death) himself seems not to be so. It is rather

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Thánatos who is dazzled and blinded by Apollo, like an owl or bat in the sunlight.

P. 5, l. 43, Rob me of my second prey.]—"You first cheated me of Admetus, and now you cheat me of his substitute."

P. 6, l. 59, The rich would buy, etc.]—Here and throughout this difficult little dialogue I follow the readings of my own text in the *Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*.

P. 7, l. 74, To lay upon her hair my sword.]—As the sacrificing priest cut off a lock of hair from the victim's head before the actual sacrifice.

P. 8, l. 77, Chorus.]—The Chorus consists of citizens, probably Elders, of the city of Pherae. Dr. Verrall has rightly pointed out that there is some general dissatisfaction in the town at Admetus's behaviour (l. 210 ff.). These citizens come to mourn with Admetus out of old friendship, though they do not altogether defend him.

The Chorus is very drastically broken up into so many separate persons conversing with one another; the treatment in the *Rhesus* is similar but even bolder. See *Rhesus*, pp. 28-31, 37-42. Cf. also the entrance-choruses of the *Trojan Women* (pp. 19-23) and the *Medea* (pp. 10-13); and ll. 872 ff., 889 ff., pp. 50, 51, below.

Instead of assigning the various lines definitely to First, Second, Third Citizen, and so on, I have put a "paragraphus" (—), the ancient Greek sign for indicating a new speaker.

P. 8, l. 82, Pelias' daughter.]—*i.e.* Alcestis.

P. 8, l. 92, Paian.]—The Healer. The word survives chiefly as a cry for help and as an epithet or title of Apollo or Asclepios. "Paian," Latin

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Paeon, is also a cry of victory; but the relation of the two meanings is not quite made out. (Pronounce rather like "Pah-yan.") Cf. l. 220.

P. 9, l. 112, To wander o'er leagues of land.]—You could sometimes save a sick person by appealing to an oracle, such as that of Apollo in Lycia or of Zeus Ammon in the Libyan desert; but now no sacrifice will help. Only Asclepios, were he still on earth, might have helped us. (See on the Prologue.)

P. 11, l. 150, 'Fore God she dies high-hearted.]—What impresses the Elder is the calm and deliberate way in which Alcestis faces these preparations.

P. 12, l. 162, Before the Hearth-Fire.]—Hestia, the hearth-fire, was a goddess, the Latin Vesta, and is addressed as "Mother." It is characteristic in Alcestis to think chiefly about happy marriages for the children.

P. 12, l. 182, Happier perhaps, more true she cannot be.]—A famous line and open to parody. Cf. Aristophanes, *Knights*, 1251 ("Another wear this crown instead of me, Happier perhaps; worse thief he cannot be"). And see on l. 367 below.

P. 15, l. 228, Hearts have bled.]—People have committed suicide for less than this.

P. 16, l. 244, O Sun.]—Alcestis has come out to see the Sun and Sky for the last time and say good-bye to them. It is a rite or practice often mentioned in Greek poetry. Her beautiful wandering lines about Charon and his boat are the more natural because she is not dying from any disease but is being mysteriously drawn away by the Powers of Death.

P. 16, l. 252, A boat, two-oared.]—She sees Charon,

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the boatman who ferried the souls of the dead across the river Styx.

P. 17, l. 259, Drawing, drawing.]—The creature whom she sees drawing her to “the palaces of the dead” is certainly not Charon, who had no wings, but was like an old boatman in a peasant’s cap and sleeveless tunic; nor can he be Hades, the throned King to whose presence she must eventually go. Apparently, therefore, he must be Thanatos, whom we have just seen on the stage. He was evidently supposed to be invisible to ordinary human eyes.

P. 18, l. 280, Alcestis’s speech.]—Great simplicity and sincerity are the keynotes of this fine speech. Alcestis does not make light of her sacrifice: she enjoyed her life and values it; she wishes one of the old people had died instead; she is very earnest that Admetus shall not marry again, chiefly for the children’s sake, but possibly also from some little shadow of jealousy. A modern dramatist would express all this, if at all, by a scene or a series of scenes of conversation; Euripides always uses the long self-revealing speech. Observe how little romantic love there is in Alcestis, though Admetus is full of it. See Preface, pp. xiii, xiv.

Pp. 19, 20, l. 328 ff., Admetus’s speech.]—If the last speech made us know Alcestis, this makes us know Admetus fully as well. At one time the beauty and passion of it almost make us forget its ultimate hollowness; at another this hollowness almost makes us lose patience with its beautiful language. In this state of balance the touch of satire in l. 338 f. (“My mother I will know no more,” etc.), and the fact that he speaks immediately after the complete sincerity of

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Alcestis, conspire to weigh down the scale against Admetus. There can be no doubt that he means, and means passionately, all that he says. Only he could not quite manage to die when it was not strictly necessary.

P. 20, l. 355, If Orpheus' voice were mine.]—The bard and prophet, Orpheus, went down to the dead to win back his wife, Eurydicê. Hades and Persephonê, spell-bound by his music, granted his prayer that Eurydicê should return to the light, on condition that he should go before her, harping, and should never look back to see if she was following. Just at the end of the journey he looked back, and she vanished. The story is told with overpowering beauty in Vergil's fourth Georgic.

P. 21, l. 367, Oh, not in death from thee Divided.]—Parodied in Aristophanes' *Archarnians* 894, where it is addressed to an eel, and the second line ends "in a beet-root fricassee." See on l. 182.

P. 23, l. 393 ff., The Little Boy's speech.]—Classical Greek sculpture and vase-painting tended to represent children not like children but like diminutive men; and something of the sort is true of Greek tragedy. The stately tragic convention has in the main to be maintained; the child must speak a language suited for heroes, or at least for high poetry. The quality of childishness has to be indicated by a word or so of child-language delicately admitted amid the stateliness. Here we have *μαῖα*, something like "mummy," at the beginning, and *νεοσσός*, "chicken" or "little bird," at the end. Otherwise most of the language is in the regular tragic diction, and some of it doubtless seems to us unsuitable for a child. If

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Milton had had to make a child speak in *Paradise Lost*, what sort of diction would he have given it?

The success or ill-success of such an attempt as this to combine the two styles, the heroic and the childlike, depends on questions of linguistic tact, and can hardly be judged with any confidence by foreigners. But I think we can see Euripides here, as in other places, reaching out at an effect which was really beyond the resources of his art, and attaining a result which, though clearly imperfect, is strangely moving. He gets great effects from the use of children in several tragedies, though he seldom lets them speak. They speak in the *Medea*, the *Andromache*, and *Suppliants*, and are mute figures in the *Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. We may notice that where his children do speak, they speak only in lyrics, never in ordinary dialogue. This is very significant, and clearly right.

The breaking-down of the child seems to string Admetus to self-control again.

P. 25, l. 428, Ye chariot-lords.]—The plain of Thessaly was famous for its cavalry.

P. 25, l. 436 ff., Chorus.]—The “King black-browed” is, of course, Hades; the “grey hand at the helm and oar,” Charon; the “Tears that Well,” the mere that spreads out from Acheron, the River of *Achê* or Sorrows.

P. 25, l. 445 ff. Alcestis shall be celebrated—and no doubt worshipped—at certain full-moon feasts in Athens and Sparta, especially at the Carneia, a great Spartan festival held at the full moon in the month Carneios (August-September). Who the ancient hero Carnos or Carneios was is not very clearly stated by

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the tradition; but at any rate he was killed, and the feast was meant to placate and perhaps to revive him. Resurrection is apt to be a feature of both moon-goddesses and vegetation spirits.

P. 27, l. 476, Entrance of Heracles.]—Generally, in the tragic convention, each character that enters either announces himself or is announced by some one on the stage; but the figure of Heracles with his club and lion-skin was so well known that his identity could be taken for granted. The Leader at once addresses him by name.

P. 27, l. 481, The Argive King.]—It was the doom of Heracles, from before his birth, to be the servant of a worser man. His master proved to be Eurystheus, King of Tiryns or Argos, who was his kinsman, and older by a day. See *Iliad* T 95 ff. Note the heroic quality of Heracles's answer in l. 491. It does not occur to him to think of reward for himself.

P. 27, l. 483, Diomedes of Thrace.]—This man, distinguished in legend from the Diomedes of the *Iliad*, was a savage king who threw wayfarers to his man-eating horses. Such horses are not mere myths; horses have often been trained to fight with their teeth, like carnivora, for war purposes. Diomêdês was a son of Arês, the War-god or Slayer, as were the other wild tyrants mentioned just below, Lycâon, the Wolf-hero, and Cynus, the Swan.

P. 30, l. 511, Right welcome were she: *i.e.* Joy.]—"Joy would be a strange visitor to me, but I know you mean kindly."

P. 30, l. 518 ff., Not thy wife? 'Tis not Alcestis?]
—The rather elaborate misleading of Heracles, without any direct lie, depends partly on the fact that the

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Greek word *γυνή* means both "woman" and "wife." —The woman, not of kin with Admetus but much loved in the house, who has lived there since her father's death left her an orphan, is of course Alcestis, but Heracles, misled by Admetus's first answers, supposes it is some dependant to whom the King happens to be attached. He naturally proposes to go away, but, with much reluctance, allows himself to be over-persuaded by Admetus. He had other friends in Thessaly, but the next castle would probably be several miles off. The guest-chambers of the castle are apparently in a separate building with a connecting passage.

As to Admetus's motive, we must remember that the entertaining of Heracles is a datum of the story in its simplest form. See Preface, pp. xiv, xv. In Euripides, Admetus is perhaps actuated by a mixture of motives, real kindness, pride in his ancestral hospitality, and a little vanity. He likes having the great Son of Zeus for a friend, and he has never yet turned any one from his doors.

Euripides passes no distinct judgment on this act of Admetus. The Leader in the dialogue blames him ("Art thou mad?") and so does Heracles hereafter, p. 56. But the Chorus glorifies his deed in a very delightful lyric. Perhaps this indicates the judgment we are meant to pass upon it. On the plane of common sense it was doubtless all wrong, but on that of imaginative poetry it was magnificent.

P. 35, ll. 569-605, Chorus.]—Apollo, worshipped as a shepherd god and a singer, harper, piper, etc. ("song-changer"), had been himself a stranger in this "House that loved the stranger": hence its

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great reward. Othrys is the end of the mountain range to the south of Pherae; Lake Boibeïs was just across the narrow end of the plain to the north-east, beyond it came Mt. Pelion and the steep harbourless coast. Up to the north-west the plain of Thessaly stretched far away towards the Molossian mountains. The wild beasts gathered round Apollo as they did round Orpheus ("There where Orpheus harped of old, And the trees awoke and knew him, And the wild things gathered to him, As he piped amid the broken Glens his music manifold."—*Bacchae*, p. 35).

P. 37, l. 614, Scene with Pherês.]—Pherês is in tradition the "eponymous hero" of Pherae, *i.e.* the mythical person who is supposed to have given his name to the town. It is only in this play that he has any particular character. The scene gives the reader a shock, but is a brilliant piece of satirical comedy, with a good deal of pathos in it, too. The line (691) *χαίρεις ὀρώων φῶς, πατέρα δ' οὐ χαίρειν δονεῖς*; ("Thou lovest the light, thinkest thou thy father loves it not?") seems to me one of the most characteristic in Euripides. It has a peculiar mordant beauty in its absolutely simple language, and one cannot measure the intensity of feeling that may be behind it. Pheres shows great power of fight, yet one feels his age and physical weakness. See Preface, p. xvi.

P. 40, l. 713 ff. The quick thrust and parry are sometimes hard to follow in reading, though in acting the sense would be plain enough. Admetus cries angrily, "Oh, live a longer life than Zeus!" "Is that a curse?" says Pheres; "are you cursing because nobody does you any harm?" (*i.e.* since you clearly have nothing else to curse for). Admetus:

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“On the contrary I blessed you; I knew you were greedy of life.” Pheres: “*I* greedy? It is *you*, I believe, that Alcestis is dying for.”

P. 42, l. 732. Acastus was Alcestis’s brother, son of Pelias.

P. 43, l. 747. It is rare in Greek tragedy for the Chorus to leave the stage altogether in the middle of a play. But they do so, for example, in the *Ajax* of Sophocles. Ajax is lost, and the Sailors who form the Chorus go out to look for him; when they are gone the scene is supposed to shift and Ajax enters alone, arranging his own death. This very effective scene of the revelling Heracles is to be explained, I think, by the Satyr-play tradition. See Preface.

P. 45, ll. 782-785. There are four lines rhyming in the Greek here; an odd and slightly drunken effect.

P. 46, l. 805 ff., A woman dead, of no one’s kin: why grieve so much?—Heracles is somewhat “shameless,” as a Greek would say; he had much more delicacy when he was sober.

P. 48, l. 837 ff. A fine speech, leaving one in doubt whether it is the outburst of a real hero or the vapouring of a half-drunken man. Just the effect intended. Electryon was a chieftain of Tiryns. His daughter, Alcmênê, the Tirynthian *Korê* or Earth-maiden, was beloved of Zeus, or, as others put it, was chosen by Zeus to be the mother of the Deliverer of mankind whom he was resolved to beget. She was married to Amphytryon of Thebes.

P. 49, l. 860 ff. If Heracles set out straight to the grave and Admetus with the procession was returning from the grave, how was it they did not

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meet? The answer is that Attic drama seldom asked such questions.

Pp. 49-54, ll. 861-961. This Threnos, or lamentation scene, seems to our minds a little long. We must remember (1) that a Tragedy *is* a Threnos—a *Trauerspiel*—and, however much it develops in the direction of a mere entertainment, the Threnos-element is of primary importance. (2) This scene has two purposes to serve; first to illustrate the helpless loneliness of Admetus when he returns to his empty house, and secondly the way in which remorse works in his mind, till in ll. 935-961 he makes public confession that he has done wrong. For both purposes one needs the illusion of a long lapse of time.

P. 53, l. 945 ff., The floor unswept.]—Probably the floor really would be unswept in the house of a primitive Thessalian chieftain whose wife was dead and her place unfilled; but I doubt if the point would have been mentioned so straightforwardly in a real tragedy.

Pp. 54-55, l. 966 ff., That which Needs Must Be.]—Ananke or Necessity.—Orphic rune.]—The charms inscribed by Orpheus on certain tablets in Thrace. Orphic literature and worship had a strong magical element in them.

P. 55, l. 995 ff., A grave-mound of the dead.]—Every existing Greek tragedy has somewhere in it a taboo grave—a grave which is either worshipped, or specially avoided or somehow magical. We may conjecture from this passage that there was in the time of Euripides a sacred tomb near Pherae, which received worship and had the story told about it that she who lay there had died for her husband.

Pp. 56-67, ll. 1008-end. This last scene must

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have been exceedingly difficult to compose, and some critics have thought it ineffective or worse. To me it seems brilliantly conceived and written, though of course it needs to be read with the imagination strongly at work. One must never forget the silent and veiled Woman on whom the whole scene centres. I have tried conjecturally to indicate the main lines of her acting, but, of course, others may read it differently.

To understand Heracles in this scene, one must first remember the traditional connexion of Satyrs (and therefore of satyric heroes) with the re-awakening of the dead Earth in spring and the return of human souls to their tribe. Dionysus was, of all the various Kouroi, the one most widely connected with resurrection ideas, and the Satyrs are his attendant daemons, who dance magic dances at the Return to Life of Semele or Persephone. And Heracles himself, in certain of his ritual aspects, has similar functions. See J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 422 f. and 365 ff., or my *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, pp. 46 f. This tradition explains, to start with, what Heracles—and this particular sort of revelling Heracles—has to do in a resurrection scene. Heracles bringing back the dead is a datum of the saga. There remain then the more purely dramatic questions about our poet's treatment of the datum.

Why, for instance, does Heracles mystify Admetus with the Veiled Woman? To break the news gently, or to retort his own mystification upon him? I think, the latter. Admetus had said that "a woman" was dead; Heracles says: "All right: here is 'a woman' whom I want you to look after."

Again, what are the feelings of Admetus himself?

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First, mere indignation and disgust at the utterly tactless proposal: then, I think, in 1061 ff. ("I must walk with care" . . . end of speech), a strange discovery about himself which amazes and humiliates him. As he looks at the woman he finds himself feeling how exactly like Alcestis she is, and then yearning towards her, almost falling in love with her. A most beautiful and poignant touch. In modern language one would say that his subconscious nature feels Alcestis there and responds emotionally to her presence; his conscious nature, believing the woman to be a stranger, is horrified at his own apparent baseness and inconstancy.

P. 57, l. 1051, Where in my castle, etc.].—The castle is divided into two main parts: a public *megaron* or great hall where the men live during the day and sleep at night, and a private region, ruled by the queen and centring in the *thalamos* or royal bed-chamber. If the new woman were taken into this "harem," even if Admetus never spoke to her, the world outside would surmise the worst and consider him dishonoured.

P. 66, l. 1148, Be righteous to thy guest, As he would have thee be.].—Does this mean "Go on being hospitable, as you have been," or "Learn after this not to take liberties with other guests"? It is hard to say

P. 66, l. 1152, The feasting day shall surely come; now I must needs away.].—A fine last word for Heracles. We have seen him feasting, but that makes a small part in his life. His main life is to perform labour upon labour in service to his king. Euripides occasionally liked this method of ending a play, not

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with a complete finish (Greek *catastrophê*), but with the opening of a door into some further vista of endurance or adventure. The *Trojan Women* ends by the women going out to the Greek ships to begin a life of slavery; the *Rhesus* with the doomed army of Trojans gathering bravely for an attack which we know will be disastrous. Here we have the story finished for Admetus and Alcestis, but no rest for Heracles. See the note at the end of my *Trojan Women*.

THE END

MEDEA

THE MEDEA

OF

EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE

WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Medea*, in spite of its background of wonder and enchantment, is not a romantic play but a tragedy of character and situation. It deals, so to speak, not with the romance itself, but with the end of the romance, a thing which is so terribly often the reverse of romantic. For all but the very highest of romances are apt to have just one flaw somewhere, and in the story of Jason and Medea the flaw was of a fatal kind.

The wildness and beauty of the Argo legend run through all Greek literature, from the mass of Corinthian lays older than our present *Iliad*, which later writers vaguely associate with the name of Eumêlus, to the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar and the beautiful *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. Our poet knows the wildness and the beauty; but it is not these qualities that he specially seeks. He takes them almost for granted, and pierces through them to the sheer tragedy that lies below.

Jason, son of Aeson, King of Iôlcô, in Thessaly, began his life in exile. His uncle Pelias had seized his father's kingdom, and Jason was borne away to the mountains by night and given, wrapped in a purple robe, to Chiron, the Centaur. When he reached manhood he came down to Iôlcô to demand, as Pindar tells us, his ancestral honour, and stood in the market-place, a world-famous figure, one-sandalled, with his

pard-skin, his two spears and his long hair, gentle and wild and fearless, as the Wise Beast had reared him. Pelias, cowed but loath to yield, promised to give up the kingdom if Jason would make his way to the unknown land of Colchis and perform a double quest. First, if I read Pindar aright, he must fetch back the soul of his kinsman Phrixus, who had died there far from home; and, secondly, find the fleece of the Golden Ram which Phrixus had sacrificed. Jason undertook the quest: gathered the most daring heroes from all parts of Hellas; built the first ship, Argo, and set to sea. After all manner of desperate adventures he reached the land of Aiêtês, king of the Colchians, and there hope failed him. By policy, by tact, by sheer courage he did all that man could do. But Aiêtês was both hostile and treacherous. The Argonauts were surrounded, and their destruction seemed only a question of days when, suddenly, unasked, and by the mercy of Heaven, Aiêtês' daughter, Mèdêa, an enchantress as well as a princess, fell in love with Jason. She helped him through all his trials; slew for him her own sleepless serpent, who guarded the fleece; deceived her father, and secured both the fleece and the soul of Phrixus. At the last moment it appeared that her brother, Absyrtus, was about to lay an ambush for Jason. She invited Absyrtus to her room, stabbed him dead, and fled with Jason over the seas. She had given up all, and expected in return a perfect love.

And what of Jason? He could not possibly avoid taking Medea with him. He probably rather loved her. She formed at the least a brilliant addition to the glory of his enterprise. Not many heroes could

produce a barbarian princess ready to leave all and follow them in blind trust. For of course, as every one knew without the telling in fifth-century Athens, no legal marriage was possible between a Greek and a barbarian from Colchis.

All through the voyage home, a world-wide baffled voyage by the Ister and the Eridanus and the African Syrtes, Medea was still in her element, and proved a constant help and counsellor to the Argonauts. When they reached Jason's home, where Pelias was still king, things began to be different. An ordered and law-abiding Greek state was scarcely the place for the untamed Colchian. We only know the catastrophe. She saw with smothered rage how Pelias hated Jason and was bent on keeping the kingdom from him, and she determined to do her lover another act of splendid service. Making the most of her fame as an enchantress, she persuaded Pelias that he could, by a certain process, regain his youth. He eagerly caught at the hope. His daughters tried the process upon him, and Pelias died in agony. Surely Jason would be grateful now!

The real result was what it was sure to be in a civilised country. Medea and her lover had to fly for their lives, and Jason was debarred for ever from succeeding to the throne of Iôlcô. Probably there was another result also in Jason's mind: the conclusion that at all costs he must somehow separate himself from this wild beast of a woman who was ruining his life. He directed their flight to Corinth, governed at the time by a ruler of some sort, whether "tyrant" or king, who was growing old and had an only daughter. Creon would naturally want a son-in-law to support and suc

ceed him. And where in all Greece could he find one stronger or more famous than the chief of the Argonauts? If only Medea were not there! No doubt Jason owed her a great debt for her various services. Still, after all, he was not married to her. And a man must not be weak in such matters as these. Jason accepted the princess's hand, and when Medea became violent, found it difficult to be really angry with Creon for instantly condemning her to exile. At this point the tragedy begins.

The *Medea* is one of the earliest of Euripides' works now preserved to us. And those of us who have in our time glowed at all with the religion of realism, will probably feel in it many of the qualities of youth. Not, of course, the more normal, sensuous, romantic youth, the youth of *Romeo and Juliet*; but another kind—crude, austere, passionate—the youth of the poet who is also a sceptic and a devotee of truth, who so hates the conventionally and falsely beautiful that he is apt to be unduly ascetic towards beauty itself. When a writer really deficient in poetry walks in this path, the result is purely disagreeable. It produces its best results when the writer, like Euripides or Tolstoy, is so possessed by an inward flame of poetry that it breaks out at the great moments and consumes the cramping theory that would hold it in. One can feel in the *Medea* that the natural and inevitable romance of the story is kept rigidly down. One word about Medea's ancient serpent, two or three references to the Clashing Rocks, one startling flash of light upon the real love of Jason's life, love for the ship Argo, these are almost all the concessions made to us by the merciless

delineator of disaster into whose hands we are fallen. Jason is a middle-aged man, with much glory, indeed, and some illusions; but a man entirely set upon building up a great career, to whom love and all its works, though at times he has found them convenient, are for the most part only irrational and disturbing elements in a world which he can otherwise mould to his will. And yet, most cruel touch of all, one feels this man to be the real Jason. It is not that he has fallen from his heroic past. It is that he was really like this always. And so with Medea. It is not only that her beauty has begun to fade; not only that she is set in surroundings which vaguely belittle and weaken her, making her no more a bountiful princess, but only an ambiguous and much criticised foreigner. Her very devotion of love for Jason, now turned to hatred, shows itself to have been always of that somewhat rank and ugly sort to which such a change is natural.

For concentrated dramatic quality and sheer intensity of passion few plays ever written can vie with the *Medea*. Yet it obtained only a third prize at its first production; and, in spite of its immense fame, there are not many scholars who would put it among their favourite tragedies. The comparative failure of the first production was perhaps due chiefly to the extreme originality of the play. The Athenians in 432 B.C. had not yet learnt to understand or tolerate such work as this, though it is likely enough that they fortified their unfavourable opinion by the sort of criticisms which we still find attributed to Aristotle and Dicæarchus.

At the present time it is certainly not the newness of the subject: I do not think it is Aegeus, nor yet

the dragon chariot, much less Medea's involuntary burst of tears in the second scene with Jason, that really produces the feeling of dissatisfaction with which many people must rise from this great play. It is rather the general scheme on which the drama is built. It is a scheme which occurs again and again in Euripides, a study of oppression and revenge. Such a subject in the hands of a more ordinary writer would probably take the form of a triumph of oppressed virtue. But Euripides gives us nothing so sympathetic, nothing so cheap and unreal. If oppression usually made people virtuous, the problems of the world would be very different from what they are. Euripides seems at times to hate the revenge of the oppressed almost as much as the original cruelty of the oppressor; or, to put the same fact in a different light, he seems deliberately to dwell upon the twofold evil of cruelty, that it not only causes pain to the victim, but actually by means of the pain makes him a worse man, so that when his turn of triumph comes, it is no longer a triumph of justice or a thing to make men rejoice. This is a grim lesson; taught often enough by history, though seldom by the fables of the poets.

Seventeen years later than the *Medea* Euripides expressed this sentiment in a more positive way in the *Trojan Women*, where a depth of wrong borne without revenge becomes, or seems for the moment to become, a thing beautiful and glorious. But more plays are constructed like the *Medea*. The *Hecuba* begins with a noble and injured Queen, and ends with her hideous vengeance on her enemy and his innocent sons. In the *Orestes* all our hearts go out to the suf-

fering and deserted prince, till we find at last that we have committed ourselves to the blood-thirst of a madman. In the *Electra*, the workers of the vengeance themselves repent.

The dramatic effect of this kind of tragedy is curious. No one can call it undramatic or tame. Yet it is painfully unsatisfying. At the close of the *Medea* I actually find myself longing for a *deus ex machinâ*, for some being like Artemis in the *Hippolytus* or the good Dioscuri of the *Electra*, to speak a word of explanation or forgiveness, or at least leave some sound of music in our ears to drown that dreadful and insistent clamour of hate. The truth is that in this play *Medea* herself is the *dea ex machinâ*. The woman whom Jason and Creon intended simply to crush has been transformed by her injuries from an individual human being into a sort of living Curse. She is inspired with superhuman force. Her wrongs and her hate fill all the sky. And the judgment pronounced on Jason comes not from any disinterested or peace-making God, but from his own victim transfigured into a devil.

From any such judgment there is an instant appeal to sane human sympathy. Jason has suffered more than enough. But that also is the way of the world. And the last word upon these tragic things is most often something not to be expressed by the sentences of even the wisest articulate judge, but only by the unspoken *lacrimæ rerum*.

G. M.

MEDEA

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

MEDEA, *daughter of Aîêtês, King of Colchis.*

JASON, *chief of the Argonauts; nephew of Pelias, King of Iólcos
in Thessaly.*

CREON, *ruler of Corinth.*

AEGEUS, *King of Athens.*

NURSE of Medea.

TWO CHILDREN of Jason and Medea.

ATTENDANT on the children.

A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Corinthian Women, with their LEADER.

Soldiers and Attendants

*The scene is laid in Corinth. The play was first acted when
Pythodôrus was Archon, Olympiad 87, year I (B.C. 431).
Euphorion was first, Sophocles second, Euripides third, with
Medea, Philoctêtes, Dictys, and the Harvesters, a Satyr-play.*

MEDEA

The Scene represents the front of MEDEA'S House in Corinth. A road to the right leads towards the royal castle, one on the left to the harbour. The NURSE is discovered alone.

NURSE.

Would God no Argo e'er had winged the seas
To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades:
No shaft of riven pine in Pêlion's glen
Shaped that first oar-blade in the hands of men
Valiant, who won, to save King Pelias' vow,
The fleece All-golden! Never then, I trow,
Mine own princess, her spirit wounded sore
With love of Jason, to the encastled shore
Had sailed of old Iôlcos: never wrought
The daughters of King Pelias, knowing not,
To spill their father's life: nor fled in fear,
Hunted for that fierce sin, to Corinth here
With Jason and her babes. This folk at need
Stood friend to her, and she in word and deed
Served alway Jason. Surely this doth bind,
Through all ill days, the hurts of humankind,
When man and woman in one music move.

But now, the world is angry, and true love
Sick as with poison. Jason doth forsake
My mistress and his own two sons, to make

His couch in a king's chamber. He must wed :
 Wed with this Creon's child, who now is head
 And chief of Corinth. Wherefore sore betrayed
 Medea calleth up the oath they made,
 They two, and wakes the claspèd hands again,
 The troth surpassing speech, and cries amain
 On God in heaven to mark the end, and how
 Jason hath paid his debt.

All fasting now

And cold, her body yielded up to pain,
 Her days a waste of weeping, she hath lain,
 Since first she knew that he was false. Her eyes
 Are lifted not; and all her visage lies
 In the dust. If friends will speak, she hears no
 more

Than some dead rock or wave that beats the shore :
 Only the white throat in a sudden shame
 May writhe, and all alone she moans the name
 Of father, and land, and home, forsook that day
 For this man's sake, who casteth her away.
 Not to be quite shut out from home . . . alas,
 She knoweth now how rare a thing that was !
 Methinks she hath a dread, not joy, to see
 Her children near. 'Tis this that maketh me
 Most tremble, lest she do I know not what.
 Her heart is no light thing, and useth not
 To brook much wrong. I know that woman, aye,
 And dread her ! Will she creep alone to die
 Bleeding in that old room, where still is laid
 Lord Jason's bed ? She hath for that a blade
 Made keen. Or slay the bridegroom and the king,
 And win herself God knows what direr thing ?

'Tis a fell spirit. Few, I ween, shall stir
Her hate unscathed, or lightly humble her.

Ha! 'Tis the children from their games again,
Rested and gay; and all their mother's pain
Forgotten! Young lives ever turn from gloom!

[*The CHILDREN and their ATTENDANT come in.*

ATTENDANT.

Thou ancient treasure of my lady's room,
What mak'st thou here before the gates alone,
And alway turning on thy lips some moan
Of old mischances? Will our mistress be
Content, this long time to be left by thee?

NURSE.

Grey guard of Jason's children, a good thrall
Hath his own grief, if any hurt befall
His masters. Aye, it holds one's heart! . . .

Meseems

I have strayed out so deep in evil dreams,
I longed to rest me here alone, and cry
Medea's wrongs to this still Earth and Sky.

ATTENDANT.

How? Are the tears yet running in her eyes?

NURSE.

'Twere good to be like thee! . . . Her sorrow lies
Scarce wakened yet, not half its perils wrought.

ATTENDANT.

Mad spirit! . . . if a man may speak his thought
Of masters mad.—And nothing in her ears
Hath sounded yet of her last cause for tears!

*[He moves towards the house, but the NURSE
checks him.]*

NURSE.

What cause, old man? . . . Nay, grudge me not one
word.

ATTENDANT.

'Tis nothing. Best forget what thou hast heard.

NURSE.

Nay, housemate, by thy beard! Hold it not hid
From me. . . . I will keep silence if thou bid.

ATTENDANT.

I heard an old man talking, where he sate
At draughts in the sun, beside the fountain gate,
And never thought of me, there standing still
Beside him. And he said, 'Twas Creon's will,
Being lord of all this land, that she be sent,
And with her her two sons, to banishment.
Maybe 'tis all false. For myself, I know
No further, and I would it were not so.

NURSE.

Jason will never bear it—his own sons
Banished,—however hot his anger runs
Against their mother!

ATTENDANT.

Old love burneth low
When new love wakes, men say. He is not now
Husband nor father here, nor any kin.

NURSE.

But this is ruin! New waves breaking in
To wreck us, ere we are righted from the old!

ATTENDANT.

Well, hold thy peace. Our mistress will be told
All in good time. Speak thou no word hereof.

NURSE.

My babes! What think ye of your father's love?
God curse him not, he is my master still:
But, oh, to them that loved him, 'tis an ill
Friend. . . .

ATTENDANT.

And what man on earth is different? How?
Hast thou lived all these years, and learned but now
That every man more loveth his own head
Than other men's? He dreameth of the bed
Of this new bride, and thinks not of his sons.

NURSE.

Go: run into the house, my little ones:
All will end happily! . . . Keep them apart:
Let not their mother meet them while her heart

Is darkened. Yester night I saw a flame
 Stand in her eye, as though she hated them,
 And would I know not what. For sure her wrath
 Will never turn nor slumber, till she hath . . .
 Go: and if some must suffer, may it be
 Not we who love her, but some enemy!

VOICE (*within*).

Oh shame and pain: O woe is me!
 Would I could die in my misery!

[*The CHILDREN and the ATTENDANT go in.*]

NURSE.

Ah, children, hark! She moves again
 Her frozen heart, her sleeping wrath.
 In, quick! And never cross her path,
 Nor rouse that dark eye in its pain;
 That fell sea-spirit, and the dire
 Spring of a will untaught, unbowed.
 Quick, now!—Methinks this weeping cloud
 Hath in its heart some thunder-fire,
 Slow gathering, that must flash ere long.
 I know not how, for ill or well,
 It turns, this uncontrollable
 Tempestuous spirit, blind with wrong.

VOICE (*within*).

Have I not suffered? Doth it call
 No tears? . . . Ha, ye beside the wall
 Unfathered children, God hate you
 As I am hated, and him, too,
 That gat you, and this house and all!

NURSE.

For pity! What have they to do,
Babes, with their father's sin? Why call
Thy curse on these? . . . Ah, children, all
These days my bosom bleeds for you.

Rude are the wills of princes: yea,
Prevailing alway, seldom crossed,
On fitful winds their moods are tossed:
'Tis best, men tread the equal way.

Aye, not with glory but with peace
May the long summers find me crowned:
For gentleness—her very sound
Is magic, and her usages

All wholesome: but the fiercely great
Hath little music on his road,
And falleth, when the hand of God
Shall move, most deep and desolate.

*[During the last words the LEADER of the
Chorus has entered. Other women follow
her.]*

LEADER.

I heard a voice and a moan,
A voice of the eastern seas:
Hath she found not yet her ease?
Speak, O agèd one.
For I stood afar at the gate,
And there came from within a cry,

And wailing desolate.

Ah, no more joy have I,
For the griefs this house doth see,
And the love it hath wrought in me.

NURSE.

There is no house! 'Tis gone. The lord
Seeketh a prouder bed: and she
Wastes in her chamber, nor one word
Will hear of care or charity.

VOICE (*within*).

O Zeus, O Earth, O Light,
Will the fire not stab my brain?
What profiteth living? Oh,
Shall I not lift the slow
Yoke, and let Life go,
As a beast out in the night,
To lie, and be rid of pain?

CHORUS.

Some Women

A.

"O Zeus, O Earth, O Light:"
The cry of a bride forlorn
Heard ye, and wailing born
Of lost delight?

B.

Why weariest thou this day,
 Wild heart, for the bed abhorred,
 The cold bed in the clay?
 Death cometh though no man pray,
 Ungarlanded, un-adorèd.
 Call him not thou.

C.

If another's arms be now
 Where thine have been,
 On his head be the sin:
 Rend not thy brow!

D.

All that thou sufferest,
 God seeth: Oh, not so sore
 Waste nor weep for the breast
 That was thine of yore.

VOICE (*within*).

Virgin of Righteousness,
 Virgin of hallowed Troth,
 Ye marked me when with an oath
 I bound him; mark no less
 That oath's end. Give me to see
 Him and his bride, who sought
 My grief when I wronged her not,
 Broken in misery,

And all her house. . . . O God,
 My mother's home, and the dim
 Shore that I left for him,
 And the voice of my brother's blood. . . .

NURSE.

Oh, wild words! Did ye hear her cry
 To them that guard man's faith forsworn,
 Themis and Zeus? . . . This wrath new-born
 Shall make mad workings ere it die.

CHORUS.

Other Women.

A.

Would she but come to seek
 Our faces, that love her well,
 And take to her heart the spell
 Of words that speak?

B.

Alas for the heavy hate
 And anger that burneth ever!
 Would it but now abate,
 Ah God, I love her yet.
 And surely my love's endeavour
 Shall fail not here.

C.

Go: from that chamber drear
 Forth to the day
 Lead her, and say, Oh, say
 That we love her dear.

D.

Go, lest her hand be hard
On the innocent: Ah, let be!
For her grief moves hitherward,
Like an angry sea.

NURSE.

That will I: though what words of mine
Or love shall move her? Let them lie
With the old lost labours! . . . Yet her eye—
Know ye the eyes of the wild kine,

The lion flash that guards their brood?
So looks she now if any thrall
Speak comfort, or draw near at all
My mistress in her evil mood.

[*The NURSE goes into the house.*]

CHORUS.

A Woman.

Alas, the bold blithe bards of old
That all for joy their music made,
For feasts and dancing manifold,
That Life might listen and be glad.

But all the darkness and the wrong,
Quick deaths and dim heart-aching things,
Would no man ease them with a song
Or music of a thousand strings?

Then song had served us in our need.
 What profit, o'er the banquet's swell
 That lingering cry that none may heed?
 The feast hath filled them: all is well!

Others.

I heard a song, but it comes no more,
 Where the tears ran over:
 A keen cry but tired, tired:
 A woman's cry for her heart's desire,
 For a traitor's kiss and a lost lover.
 But a prayer, methinks, yet riseth sore
 To God, to Faith, God's ancient daughter—
 The Faith that over sundering seas
 Drew her to Hellas, and the breeze
 Of midnight shivered, and the door
 Closed of the salt unsounded water.

*[During the last words MEDEA has come
 out from the house.]*

MEDEA.

Women of Corinth, I am come to show
 My face, lest ye despise me. For I know
 Some heads stand high and fail not, even at night
 Alone—far less like this, in all men's sight:
 And we, who study not our wayfarings
 But feel and cry—Oh we are drifting things,
 And evil! For what truth is in men's eyes,
 Which search no heart, but in a flash despise

A strange face, shuddering back from one that ne'er
Hath wronged them? . . . Sure, far-comers anywhere,
I know, must bow them and be gentle. Nay,
A Greek himself men praise not, who alway
Should seek his own will recking not. . . . But I—
This thing undreamed of, sudden from on high,
Hath sapped my soul: I dazzle where I stand,
The cup of all life shattered in my hand,
Longing to die—O friends! He, even he,
Whom to know well was all the world to me,
The man I loved, hath proved most evil.—Oh,
Of all things upon earth that bleed and grow,
A herb most bruised is woman. We must pay
Our store of gold, hoarded for that one day,
To buy us some man's love; and lo, they bring
A master of our flesh! There comes the sting
Of the whole shame. And then the jeopardy,
For good or ill, what shall that master be;
Reject she cannot: and if he but stays
His suit, 'tis shame on all that woman's days.
So thrown amid new laws, new places, why,
'Tis magic she must have, or prophecy—
Home never taught her that—how best to guide
Toward peace this thing that sleepeth at her side.
And she who, labouring long, shall find some way
Whereby her lord may bear with her, nor fray
His yoke too fiercely, blessed is the breath
That woman draws! Else, let her pray for death.
Her lord, if he be wearied of the face
Withindoors, gets him forth; some merrier place
Will ease his heart: but she waits on, her whole
Vision enchained on a single soul.

And then, forsooth, 'tis they that face the call
Of war, while we sit sheltered, hid from all
Peril!—False mocking! Sooner would I stand
Three times to face their battles, shield in hand,
Than bear one child.

But peace! There cannot be
Ever the same tale told of thee and me.
Thou hast this city, and thy father's home,
And joy of friends, and hope in days to come:
But I, being citiless, am cast aside
By him that wedded me, a savage bride
Won in far seas and left—no mother near,
No brother, not one kinsman anywhere
For harbour in this storm. Therefore of thee
I ask one thing. If chance yet ope to me
Some path, if even now my hand can win
Strength to requite this Jason for his sin,
Betray me not! Oh, in all things but this,
I know how full of fears a woman is,
And faint at need, and shrinking from the light
Of battle: but once spoil her of her right
In man's love, and there moves, I warn thee well,
No bloodier spirit between heaven and hell.

LEADER.

I will betray thee not. It is but just,
Thou smite him.—And that weeping in the dust
And stormy tears, how should I blame them? . . .

Stay:

'Tis Creon, lord of Corinth, makes his way
Hither, and bears, methinks, some word of weight.

Enter from the right CREON, the King, with armed Attendants.

CREON.

Thou woman sullen-eyed and hot with hate
Against thy lord, Medea, I here command
That thou and thy two children from this land
Go forth to banishment. Make no delay:
Seeing ourselves, the King, are come this day
To see our charge fulfilled; nor shall again
Look homeward ere we have led thy children twain
And thee beyond our realm's last boundary.

MEDEA.

Lost! Lost!
Mine haters at the helm with sail flung free
Pursuing; and for us no beach nor shore
In the endless waters! . . . Yet, though stricken sore,
I still will ask thee, for what crime, what thing
Unlawful, wilt thou cast me out, O King?

CREON

What crime? I fear thee, woman—little need
To cloak my reasons—lest thou work some deed
Of darkness on my child. And in that fear
Reasons enough have part. Thou comest here
A wise-woman confessed, and full of lore
In unknown ways of evil. Thou art sore
In heart, being parted from thy lover's arms.
And more, thou hast made menace . . . so the
alarms

But now have reached mine ear . . . on bride and groom,
And him who gave the bride, to work thy doom
Of vengeance. Which, ere yet it be too late,
I sweep aside. I choose to earn thine hate
Of set will now, not palter with the mood
Of mercy, and hereafter weep in blood.

MEDEA.

'Tis not the first nor second time, O King,
That fame hath hurt me, and come nigh to bring
My ruin. . . . How can any man, whose eyes
Are wholesome, seek to rear his children wise
Beyond men's wont? Much helplessness in arts
Of common life, and in their townsmen's hearts
Envy deep-set . . . so much their learning brings!
Come unto fools with knowledge of new things,
They deem it vanity, not knowledge. Aye,
And men that erst for wisdom were held high,
Feel thee a thorn to fret them, privily
Held higher than they. So hath it been with me.
A wise-woman I am; and for that sin
To divers ill names men would pen me in;
A seed of strife; an eastern dreamer; one
Of brand not theirs; one hard to play upon . . .
Ah, I am not so wondrous wise!—And now,
To thee, I am terrible! What fearest thou?
What dire deed? Do I tread so proud a path—
Fear me not thou!—that I should brave the wrath
Of princes? Thou: what has thou ever done
To wrong me? Granted thine own child to one
Whom thy soul chose.—Ah, *him* out of my heart
I hate; but thou, meseems, hast done thy part

Not ill. And for thine houses' happiness
I hold no grudge. Go: marry, and God bless
Your issues. Only suffer me to rest
Somewhere within this land. Though sore oppressed,
I will be still, knowing mine own defeat.

CREON.

Thy words be gentle: but I fear me yet
Lest even now there creep some wickedness
Deep hid within thee. And for that the less
I trust thee now than ere these words began.
A woman quick of wrath, aye, or a man,
Is easier watching than the cold and still.

Up, straight, and find thy road! Mock not my will
With words. This doom is passed beyond recall;
Nor all thy crafts shall help thee, being withal
My manifest foe, to linger at my side.

MEDEA (*suddenly throwing herself down and
clinging to CREON*).

Oh, by thy knees! By that new-wedded bride . . .

CREON.

'Tis waste of words. Thou shalt not weaken me.

MEDEA.

Wilt hunt me? Spurn me when I kneel to thee?

CREON.

'Tis mine own house that kneels to me, not thou.

MEDEA.

Home, my lost home, how I desire thee now!

CREON.

And I mine, and my child, beyond all things.

MEDEA.

O Loves of man, what curse is on your wings!

CREON.

Blessing or curse, 'tis as their chances flow.

MEDEA.

Remember, Zeus, the cause of all this woe!

CREON.

Oh, rid me of my pains! Up, get thee gone!

MEDEA.

What would I with thy pains? I have mine own.

CREON.

Up: or, 'fore God, my soldiers here shall fling . . .

MEDEA.

Not that! Not that! . . . I do but pray, O King . . .

CREON.

Thou wilt not? I must face the harsher task?

MEDEA

I accept mine exile. 'Tis not that I ask.

CREON.

Why then so wild? Why clinging to mine hand?

MEDEA (*rising*).

For one day only leave me in thy land
At peace, to find some counsel, ere the strain
Of exile fall, some comfort for these twain,
Mine innocents; since others take no thought,
It seems, to save the babes that they begot.

Ah! Thou wilt pity them! Thou also art
A father: thou hast somewhere still a heart
That feels. . . . I reckon not of myself: 'tis they
That break me, fallen upon so dire a day.

CREON.

Mine is no tyrant's mood. Aye, many a time
Ere this my tenderness hath marred the chime
Of wisest counsels. And I know that now
I do mere folly. But so be it! Thou
Shalt have this grace . . . But this I warn thee clear,
If once the morrow's sunlight find thee here
Within my borders, thee or child of thine,
Thou diest! . . . Of this judgment not a line

Shall waver nor abate. So linger on,
 If thou needs must, till the next risen sun;
 No further. . . . In one day there scarce can be
 Those perils wrought whose dread yet haunteth me.
[Exit CREON with his suite.]

CHORUS.

O woman, woman of sorrow,
 Where wilt thou turn and flee?
 What town shall be thine to-morrow,
 What land of all lands that be,
 What door of a strange man's home?
 Yea, God hath hunted thee,
 Medea, forth to the foam
 Of a trackless sea.

MEDEA.

Defeat on every side; what else?—But Oh,
 Not here the end is: think it not! I know
 For bride and groom one battle yet untried,
 And goodly pains for him that gave the bride.

Dost dream I would have grovelled to this man,
 Save that I won mine end, and shaped my plan
 For merry deeds? My lips had never deigned
 Speak word with him: my flesh been never stained
 With touching. . . . Fool, Oh, triple fool! It lay
 So plain for him to kill my whole essay
 By exile swift: and, lo, he sets me free
 This one long day: wherein mine haters three
 Shall lie here dead, the father and the bride
 And husband—mine, not hers! Oh, I have tried

So many thoughts of murder to my turn,
 I know not which best likes me. Shall I burn
 Their house with fire? Or stealing past unseen
 To Jason's bed—I have a blade made keen
 For that—stab, breast to breast, that wedded pair?
 Good, but for one thing. When I 'am taken there,
 And killed, they will laugh loud who hate me. . . .

Nay,

I love the old way best, the simple way
 Of poison, where we too are strong as men.
 Ah me!

And they being dead—what place shall hold me then?
 What friend shall rise, with land inviolate
 And trusty doors, to shelter from their hate
 This flesh? . . . None anywhere! . . . A little more
 I needs must wait: and, if there ope some door
 Of refuge, some strong tower to shield me, good:
 In craft and darkness I will hunt this blood.
 Else, if mine hour be come and no hope nigh,
 Then sword in hand, full-willed and sure to die,
 I yet will live to slay them. I will wend
 Man-like, their road of daring to the end.

So help me She who of all Gods hath been
 The best to me, of all my chosen queen
 And helpmate, Hecatê, who dwells apart,
 The flame of flame, in my fire's inmost heart:
 For all their strength, they shall not stab my soul
 And laugh thereafter! Dark and full of dole
 Their bridal feast shall be, most dark the day
 They joined their hands, and hunted me away.

Awake thee now, Medea! Whatso plot
 Thou hast, or cunning, strive and falter not.

On to the peril-point! Now comes the strain
 Of daring. Shall they trample thee again?
 How? And with Hellas laughing o'er thy fall
 While this thief's daughter weds, and weds withal
 Jason? . . . A true king was thy father, yea,
 And born of the 'ancient Sun! . . . Thou know'st
 the way;

And God hath made thee woman, things most vain
 For help, but wondrous in the paths of pain.

[MEDEA goes into the House.]

CHORUS.

Back streams the wave on the ever-running river:

Life, life is changed and the laws of it o'ertrod.

Man shall be the slave, the affrighted, the low-liver!

Man hath forgotten God.

And woman, yea, woman, shall be terrible in story:

The tales too, meseemeth, shall be other than of
 yore.

For a fear there is that cometh out of Woman and a
 glory,

And the hard hating voices shall encompass her no
 more!

The old bards shall cease, and their memory that
 lingers

Of frail brides and faithless, shall be shrivelled as
 with fire.

For they loved us not, nor knew us: and our lips were
 dumb, our fingers

Could wake not the secret of the lyre.

Else, else, O God the Singer, I had sung amid their
rages

A long tale of Man and his deeds for good and ill.
But the old World knoweth—'tis the speech of all his
ages—

Man's wrong and ours: he knoweth and is still.

Some Women.

Forth from thy father's home
Thou camest, O heart of fire,
To the Dark Blue Rocks, to the clashing foam,
To the seas of thy desire:

Till the Dark Blue Bar was crossed;
And, lo, by an alien river
Standing, thy lover lost,
Void-armed for ever,

Forth yet again, O lowest
Of landless women, a ranger
Of desolate ways, thou goest,
From the walls of the stranger.

Others.

And the great Oath waxeth weak;
And Ruth, as a thing outstriven,
Is fled, fled, from the shores of the Greek,
Away on the winds of heaven.

Dark is the house afar,
Where an old king called thee daughter;
All that was once thy star
In stormy water,

Dark: and, lo, in the nearer
House that was sworn to love thee,
Another, queenlier, dearer,
Is thronèd above thee.

Enter from the right JASON.

JASON.

Oft have I seen, in other days than these,
How a dark temper maketh maladies
No friend can heal. 'Twas easy to have kept
Both land and home. It needed but to accept
Unstrivingly the pleasure of our lords.
But thou, for mere delight in stormy words,
Wilt lose all! . . . Now thy speech provokes not me.
Rail on. Of all mankind let Jason be
Most evil; none shall check thee. But for these
Dark threats cast out against the majesties
Of Corinth, count as veriest gain thy path
Of exile. I myself, when princely wrath
Was hot against thee, strove with all good will
To appease the wrath, and wished to keep thee still
Beside me. But thy mouth would never stay
From vanity, blaspheming night and day
Our masters. Therefore thou shalt fly the land.

Yet, even so, I will not hold my hand
From succouring mine own people. Here am I
To help thee, woman, pondering heedfully

Thy new state. For I would not have thee flung
Provisionless away—aye, and the young
Children as well; nor lacking aught that will
Of mine can bring thee. Many a lesser ill
Hangs on the heels of exile. . . . Aye, and though
Thou hate me, dream not that my heart can know
Or fashion aught of angry will to thee.

MEDEA

Evil, most evil! . . . since thou grantest me
That comfort, the worst weapon left me now
To smite a coward. . . . Thou comest to me, thou,
Mine enemy! (*Turning to the CHORUS.*) Oh, say,
how call ye this,

To face, and smile, the comrade whom his kiss
Betrayed? Scorn? Insult? Courage? None of
these:

'Tis but of all man's inward sicknesses
The vilest, that he knoweth not of shame
Nor pity! Yet I praise him that he came . . .
To me it shall bring comfort, once to clear
My heart on thee, and thou shalt wince to hear.

I will begin with that, 'twixt me and thee,
That first befell. I saved thee. I saved thee—
Let thine own Greeks be witness, every one
That sailed on Argo—saved thee, sent alone
To yoke with yokes the bulls of fiery breath,
And sow that Acre of the Lords of Death;
And mine own ancient Serpent, who did keep
The Golden Fleece, the eyes that knew not sleep,
And shining coils, him also did I smite
Dead for thy sake, and lifted up the light

That bade thee live. Myself, uncounsellèd,
 Stole forth from father and from home, and fled
 Where dark Iôlcôs under Pelion lies,
 With thee—Oh, single-hearted more than wise!
 I murdered Pelias, yea, in agony,
 By his own daughters' hands, for sake of thee;
 I swept their house like War.—And hast thou then
 Accepted all—O evil yet again!—
 And cast me off and taken thee for bride
 Another? And with children at thy side!
 One could forgive a childless man. But no:
 I have borne thee children . . .

Is sworn faith so low

And weak a thing? I understand it not.
 Are the old gods dead? Are the old laws forgot,
 And new laws made? Since not my passioning,
 But thine own heart, doth cry thee for a thing
 Forsworn.

*[She catches sight of her own hand which she
 has thrown out to denounce him.]*

Poor, poor right hand of mine, whom he
 Did cling to, and these knees, so cravingly,
 We are unclean, thou and I; we have caught the stain
 Of bad men's flesh . . . and dreamed our dreams in vain.

Thou comest to befriend me? Give me, then,
 Thy counsel. 'Tis not that I dream again
 For good from thee: but, questioned, thou wilt show
 The viler. Say: now whither shall I go?
 Back to my father? Him I did betray,
 And all his land, when we two fled away.
 To those poor Peliad maids? For them 'twere good
 To take me in, who spilled their father's blood. . . .

Aye, so my whole life stands! There were at home
Who loved me well: to them I am become
A curse. And the first friends who sheltered me,
Whom most I should have spared, to pleasure thee
I have turned to foes. Oh, therefore hast thou laid
My crown upon me, blest of many a maid
In Hellas, now I have won what all did crave,
Thee, the world-wondered lover and the brave;
Who this day looks and sees me banished, thrown
Away with these two babes, all, all, alone . . .
Oh, merry mocking when the lamps are red:
“Where go the bridegroom’s babes to beg their bread
In exile, and the woman who gave all
To save him?”

O great God, shall gold withal
Bear thy clear mark, to sift the base and fine,
And o’er man’s living visage runs no sign
To show the lie within, ere all too late?

LEADER.

Dire and beyond all healing is the hate
When hearts that loved are turned to enmity.

JASON.

In speech at least, meseemeth, I must be
Not evil; but, as some old pilot goes
Furled to his sail’s last edge, when danger blows
Too fiery, run before the wind and swell,
Woman, of thy loud storms.—And thus I tell
My tale. Since thou wilt build so wondrous high
Thy deeds of service in my jeopardy,

To all my crew and quest I know but one
Saviour, of Gods or mortals one alone,
The Cyprian. Oh, thou hast both brain and wit,
Yet underneath . . . nay, all the tale of it
Were graceless telling; how sheer love, a fire
Of poison-shafts, compelled thee with desire
To save me. But enough. I will not score
That count too close. 'Twas good help: and therefor
I give thee thanks, howe'er the help was wrought.
Howbeit, in my deliverance, thou hast got
Far more than given. A good Greek land hath
been

Thy lasting home, not barbary. Thou hast seen
Our ordered life, and justice, and the long
Still grasp of law not changing with the strong
Man's pleasure. Then, all Hellas far and near
Hath learned thy wisdom, and in every ear
Thy fame is. Had thy days run by unseen
On that last edge of the world, where then had been
The story of great Medea? Thou and I . . .
What worth to us were treasures heaped high
In rich kings' rooms; what worth a voice of gold
More sweet than ever rang from Orpheus old,
Unless our deeds have glory?

Speak I so,
Touching the Quest I wrought, thyself did throw
The challenge down. Next for thy cavilling
Of wrath at mine alliance with a king,
Here thou shalt see I both was wise, and free
From touch of passion, and a friend to thee
Most potent, and my children . . . Nay, be still!

When first I stood in Corinth, clogged with ill

From many a desperate mischance, what bliss
Could I that day have dreamed of, like to this,
To wed with a king's daughter, I exiled
And beggared? Not—what makes thy passion
wild—

From loathing of thy bed; not over-fraught
With love for this new bride; not that I sought
To upbuild mine house with offspring: 'tis enough,
What thou hast borne: I make no word thereof:
But, first and greatest, that we all might dwell
In a fair house and want not, knowing well
That poor men have no friends, but far and near
Shunning and silence. Next, I sought to rear
Our sons in nurture worthy of my race,
And, raising brethren to them, in one place
Join both my houses, and be all from now
Prince-like and happy. What more need hast
thou

Of children? And for me, it serves my star
To link in strength the children that now are
With those that shall be.

Have I counselled ill?

Not thine own self would say it, couldst thou still
One hour thy jealous flesh.—'Tis ever so!
Who looks for more in women? When the flow
Of love runs plain, why, all the world is fair:
But, once there fall some ill chance anywhere
To baulk that thirst, down in swift hate are trod
Men's dearest aims and noblest. Would to God
We mortals by some other seed could raise
Our fruits, and no blind women block our ways!
Then had there been no curse to wreck mankind.

LEADER.

Lord Jason, very subtly hast thou twined
Thy speech : but yet, though all athwart thy will
I speak, this is not well thou dost, but ill,
Betraying her who loved thee and was true.

MEDEA.

Surely I have my thoughts, and not a few
Have held me strange. To me it seemeth, when
A crafty tongue is given to evil men
'Tis like to wreck, not help them. Their own brain
Tempts them with lies to dare and dare again,
Till . . . no man hath enough of subtlety.
As thou—be not so seeming-fair to me
Nor deft of speech. One word will make thee fall.
Wert thou not false, 'twas thine to tell me all,
And charge me help thy marriage path, as I
Did love thee ; not befool me with a lie.

JASON.

An easy task had that been! Aye, and thou
A loving aid, who canst not, even now,
Still that loud heart that surges like the tide!

MEDEA.

That moved thee not. Thine old barbarian bride,
The queen out of the east who loved thee sore,
She grew grey-haired, she served thy pride no more.

JASON.

Now understand for once! The girl to me
Is nothing, in this web of sovranty
I hold. I do but seek to save, even yet,
Thee: and for brethren to our sons beget
Young kings, to prosper all our lives again.

MEDEA.

God shelter me from prosperous days of pain,
And wealth that maketh wounds about my heart.

JASON.

Wilt change that prayer, and choose a wiser part?
Pray not to hold true sense for pain, nor rate
Thyself unhappy, being too fortunate.

MEDEA.

Aye, mock me; thou hast where to lay thine head,
But I go naked to mine exile.

JASON.

Tread
Thine own path! Thou hast made it all to be.

MEDEA.

How? By seducing and forsaking thee?

JASON.

By those vile curses on the royal halls
Let loose. . . .

MEDEA.

On thy house also, as chance falls,
I am a living curse.

JASON.

Oh, peace! Enough
Of these vain wars: I will no more thereof.
If thou wilt take from all that I possess
Aid for these babes and thine own helplessness
Of exile, speak thy bidding. Here I stand
Full-willed to succour thee with stintless hand,
And send my signet to old friends that dwell
On foreign shores, who will entreat thee well.
Refuse, and thou shalt do a deed most vain.
But cast thy rage away, and thou shalt gain
Much, and lose little for thine anger's sake.

MEDEA.

I will not seek thy friends. I will not take
Thy givings. Give them not. Fruits of a stem
Unholy bring no blessing after them.

JASON.

Now God in heaven be witness, all my heart
Is willing, in all ways, to do its part

For thee and for thy babes. But nothing good
Can please thee. In sheer savageness of mood
Thou drivest from thee every friend. Wherefore
I warrant thee, thy pains shall be the more.

[He goes slowly away.]

MEDEA.

Go: thou art weary for the new delight
Thou wooest, so long tarrying out of sight
Of her sweet chamber. Go, fulfil thy pride,
O bridegroom! For it may be, such a bride
Shall wait thee,—yea, God heareth me in this—
As thine own heart shall sicken ere it kiss.

CHORUS.

Alas, the Love that falleth like a flood,
Strong-winged and transitory:
Why praise ye him? What beareth he of good
To man, or glory?
Yet Love there is that moves in gentleness,
Heart-filling, sweetest of all powers that bless.
Loose not on me, O Holder of man's heart,
Thy golden quiver,
Nor steep in poison of desire the dart
That heals not ever.

The pent hate of the word that cavilleth,
The strife that hath no fill,
Where once was fondness; and the mad heart's breath
For strange love panting still:
O Cyprian, cast me not on these; but sift,
Keen-eyed, of love the good and evil gift.

Make Innocence my friend, God's fairest star,
 Yea, and abate not
 The rare sweet beat of bosoms without war,
 That love, and hate not.

Others.

Home of my heart, land of my own,
 Cast me not, nay, for pity,
 Out on my ways, helpless, alone,
 Where the feet fail in the mire and stone,
 A woman without a city.
 Ah, not that! Better the end:
 The green grave cover me rather,
 If a break must come in the days I know,
 And the skies be changed and the earth below;
 For the weariest road that man may wend
 Is forth from the home of his father.

Lo, we have seen: 'tis not a song
 Sung, nor learned of another.
 For whom hast thou in thy direst wrong
 For comfort? Never a city strong
 To hide thee, never a brother.

Ah, but the man—cursèd be he,
 Cursèd beyond recover,
 Who openeth, shattering, seal by seal,
 A friend's clean heart, then turns his heel,
 Deaf unto love: never in me
 Friend shall he know nor lover.

[*While MEDEA is waiting downcast, seated upon her door-step, there passes from the left a traveller with followers. As he catches sight of MEDEA he stops.*

ÆGEUS.

Have joy, Medea! 'Tis the homeliest
Word that old friends can greet with, and the best.

MEDEA (*looking up, surprised*).

Oh, joy on thee, too, Ægeus, gentle king
Of Athens!—But whence com'st thou journeying?

ÆGEUS.

From Delphi now and the old encavern'd stair. . . .

MEDEA.

Where Earth's heart speaks in song? What mad'st
thou there?

ÆGEUS.

Prayed heaven for children—the same scarch always.

MEDEA.

Children? Ah God! Art childless to this day?

ÆGEUS.

So God hath willed. Childless and desolate.

MEDEA.

What word did Phœbus speak, to change thy fate?

AEGEUS.

Riddles, too hard for mortal man to read.

MEDEA.

Which I may hear?

AEGEUS.

Assuredly: they need

A rarer wit.

MEDEA.

How said he?

AEGEUS.

Not to spill

Life's wine, nor seek for more. . . .

MEDEA.

Until?

AEGEUS.

Until

I tread the hearth-stone of my sires of yore.

MEDEA.

And what should bring thee here, by Creon's shore?

AEGEUS.

One Pittheus know'st thou, high lord of Trozên?

MEDEA.

Aye, Pelops' son, a man most pure of sin.

AEGEUS.

Him I would ask, touching Apollo's will.

MEDEA.

Much use in God's ways hath he, and much skill.

AEGEUS.

And, long years back he was my battle-friend,
The truest e'er man had.

MEDEA.

Well, may God send
Good hap to thee, and grant all thy desire.

AEGEUS.

But thou . . . ? Thy frame is wasted, and the fire
Dead in thine eyes.

MEDEA.

Aegeus, my husband is
The falsest man in the world.

AEGEUS.

What word is this ?
Say clearly what thus makes thy visage dim ?

MEDEA.

He is false to me, who never injured him.

AEGEUS.

What hath he done? Show all, that I may see.

MEDEA.

Ta'en him a wife; a wife, set over me
To rule his house.

AEGEUS.

He hath not dared to do,
Jason, a thing so shameful?

MEDEA.

Aye, 'tis true:
And those he loved of yore have no place now.

AEGEUS.

Some passion sweepeth him? Or is it thou
He turns from?

MEDEA.

Passion, passion to betray
His dearest!

AEGEUS.

Shame be his, so fallen away
From honour!

MEDEA.

Passion to be near a throne,
A king's heir!

AEGEUS.

How, who gives the bride? Say on.

MEDEA.

Creon, who o'er all Corinth standeth chief.

AEGEUS.

Woman, thou hast indeed much cause for grief.

MEDEA.

'Tis ruin.—And they have cast me out as well.

AEGEUS.

Who? 'Tis a new wrong this, and terrible.

MEDEA.

Creon the king, from every land and shore. . . .

AEGEUS.

And Jason suffers him? Oh, 'tis too sore!

MEDEA.

He loveth to bear bravely ills like these!

But, Aegeus, by thy beard, oh, by thy knees,
I pray thee, and I give me for thine own,
Thy suppliant, pity me! Oh, pity one
So miserable. Thou never wilt stand there
And see me cast out friendless to despair.
Give me a home in Athens . . . by the fire
Of thine own hearth! Oh, so may thy desire
Of children be fulfilled of God, and thou
Die happy! . . . Thou canst know not; even now
Thy prize is won! I, I will make of thee
A childless man no more. The seed shall be,
I swear it, sown. Such magic herbs I know.

AEGEUS.

Woman, indeed my heart goes forth to show
This help to thee, first for religion's sake,
Then for thy promised hope, to heal my ache
Of childlessness. 'Tis this hath made mine whole
Life as a shadow, and starved out my soul.
But thus it stands with me. Once make thy way
To Attic earth, I, as in law I may,
Will keep thee and befriend. But in this land,
Where Creon rules, I may not raise my hand
To shelter thee. Move of thine own essay
To seek my house, there thou shalt alway stay,
Inviolatè, never to be seized again.
But come thyself from Corinth. I would fain
Even in foreign eves be alway just.

MEDEA.

Tis well. Give me an oath wherein to trust
And all that man could ask thou hast granted me.

AEGEUS.

Dost trust me not? Or what thing troubleth thee?

MEDEA.

I trust thee. But so many, far and near,
Do hate me—all King Pelias' house, and here
Creon. Once bound by oaths and sanctities
Thou canst not yield me up for such as these
To drag from Athens. But a spoken word,
No more, to bind thee, which no God hath heard. . .
The embassies, methinks, would come and go:
They all are friends to thee. . . . Ah me, I know
Thou wilt not list to me! So weak am I,
And they full-filled with gold and majesty.

AEGEUS.

Methinks 'tis a far foresight, this thine oath.
Still, if thou so wilt have it, nothing loath
Am I to serve thee. Mine own hand is so
The stronger, if I have this plea to show
Thy persecutors: and for thee withal
The bond more sure.—On what God shall I call?

MEDEA.

Swear by the Earth thou treadest, by the Sun,
Sire of my sires, and all the gods as one. . . .

AEGEUS.

To do what thing or not do? Make all plain.

MEDEA.

Never thyself to cast me out again.
Nor let another, whatsoe'er his plea,
Take me. while thou yet livest and art free.

AEGEUS.

Never: so hear me, Earth, and the great star
Of daylight, and all other gods that are!

MEDEA.

'Tis well: and if thou falter from thy vow . . . ?

AEGEUS.

God's judgment on the godless break my brow!

MEDEA.

Go! Go thy ways rejoicing.—All is bright
And clear before me. Go: and ere the night
Myself will follow, when the deed is done
I purpose, and the end I thirst for won.

[AEGEUS and his train depart.]

CHORUS.

Farewell: and Maia's guiding Son
Back lead thee to thy hearth and fire,
Aegeus; and all the long desire
That wasteth thee, at last be won:
Our eyes have seen thee as thou art,
A gentle and a righteous heart.

MEDEA.

God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies!
At last the victory dawneth! Yea, mine eyes
See, and my foot is on the mountain's brow.
Mine enemies! Mine enemies, oh, now
Atonement cometh! Here at my worst hour
A friend is found, a very port of power
To save my shipwreck. Here will I make fast
Mine anchor, and escape them at the last
In Athens' wallèd hill.—But ere the end
'Tis meet I show thee all my counsel, friend:
Take it, no tale to make men laugh withal!

Straightway to Jason I will send some thrall
To entreat him to my presence. Comes he here,
Then with soft reasons will I feed his ear,
How his will now is my will, how all things
Are well, touching this marriage-bed of kings
For which I am betrayed—all wise and rare
And profitable! Yet will I make one prayer,
That my two children be no more exiled
But stay. . . . Oh, not that I would leave a child

Here upon angry shores till those have laughed
Who hate me: 'tis that I will slay by craft
The king's daughter. With gifts they shall be sent,
Gifts to the bride to spare their banishment,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold.
Which raiment let her once but take, and fold
About her, a foul death that girl shall die
And all who touch her in her agony.

Such poison shall they drink, my robe and wreath!

Howbeit, of that no more. I gnash my teeth
Thinking on what a path my feet must tread
Thereafter. I shall lay those children dead—
Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away!
Then, leaving Jason childless, and the day
As night above him, I will go my road
To exile, flying, flying from the blood
Of these my best-beloved, and having wrought
All horror, so but one thing reach me not,
The laugh of them that hate us.

Let it come!

What profits life to me? I have no home,
No country now, nor shield from any wrong.
That was my evil hour, when down the long
Halls of my father out I stole, my will
Chained by a Greek man's voice, who still, oh, still,
If God yet live, shall all requited be.
For never child of mine shall Jason see
Hereafter living, never child beget
From his new bride, who this day, desolate
Even as she made me desolate, shall die
Shrieking amid my poisons. . . . Names have I
Among your folk? One light? One weak of hand?
An eastern dreamer?—Nay, but with the brand

Of strange suns burnt, my hate, by God above,
A perilous thing, and passing sweet my love!
For these it is that make life glorious.

LEADER.

Since thou has bared thy fell intent to us
I, loving thee, and helping in their need
Man's laws, adjure thee, dream not of this deed!

MEDEA.

There is no other way.—I pardon thee
Thy littleness, who art not wronged like me.

LEADER.

Thou canst not kill the fruit thy body bore!

MEDEA.

Yes: if the man I hate be pained the more.

LEADER.

And thou made miserable, most miserable?

MEDEA

Oh, let it come! All words of good or ill
Are wasted now.

*[She claps her hands: the NURSE comes out
from the house.]*

Ho, woman; get thee gone
And lead lord Jason hither. . . There is none

Like thee, to work me these high services.
But speak no word of what my purpose is,
As thou art faithful, thou, and bold to try
All succours, and a woman even as I!

[*The NURSE departs.*

CHORUS.

The sons of Erechtheus, the olden,
Whom high gods planted of yore
In an old land of heaven upholden,
A proud land untrodden of war:
They are hungered, and, lo, their desire
With wisdom is fed as with meat:
In their skies is a shining of fire,
A joy in the fall of their feet:
And thither, with manifold dowers,
From the North, from the hills, from the morn,
The Muses did gather their powers,
That a child of the Nine should be born;
And Harmony, sown as the flowers,
Grew gold in the acres of corn.

And Cephîsus, the fair-flowing river—
The Cyprian dipping her hand
Hath drawn of his dew, and the shiver
Of her touch is as joy in the land.
For her breathing in fragrance is written,
And in music her path as she goes,
And the cloud of her hair, it is litten
With stars of the wind-woven rose.
So fareth she ever and ever,
And forth of her bosom is blown,

As dews on the winds of the river,
 An hunger of passions unknown,
 Strong Loves of all godlike endeavour,
 Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.

Some Women.

But Cephîsus the fair-flowing,
 Will he bear thee on his shore?
 Shall the land that succours all, succour thee,
 Who art foul among thy kind,
 With the tears of children blind?
 Dost thou see the red gash growing,
 Thine own burden dost thou see?
 Every side, Every way,
 Lo, we kneel to thee and pray:
 By thy knees, by thy soul, O woman wild!
 One at least thou canst not slay,
 Not thy child!

Others.

Hast thou ice that thou shalt bind it
 To thy breast, and make thee dead
 To thy children, to thine own spirit's pain?
 When the hand knows what it dares,
 When thine eyes look into theirs,
 Shalt thou keep by tears unblinded
 Thy dividing of the slain?
 These be deeds Not for thee:
 These be things that cannot be!
 Thy babes—though thine hardihood be fell,
 When they cling about thy knee,
 'Twill be well!

Enter JASON.

JASON.

I answer to thy call. Though full of hate
Thou be, I yet will not so far abate
My kindness for thee, nor refuse mine ear.
Say in what new desire thou hast called me here.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray thee, for my words but now
Spoken, forgive me. My bad moods. . . . Oh, thou
At least wilt strive to bear with them! There be
Many old deeds of love 'twixt me and thee.
Lo, I have reasoned with myself apart
And chidden: "Why must I be mad, O heart
Of mine: and raging against one whose word
Is wisdom: making me a thing abhorred
To them that rule the land, and to mine own
Husband, who doth but that which, being done,
Will help us all—to wed a queen, and get
Young kings for brethren to my sons? And yet
I rage alone, and cannot quit my rage—
What aileth me?—when God sends harbourage
So simple? Have I not my children? Know
I not we are but exiles, and must go
Beggared and friendless else?" Thought upon
thought
So pressed me, till I knew myself full-fraught
With bitterness of heart and blinded eyes.
So now—I give thee thanks: and hold thee wise

To have caught this anchor for our aid. The fool
Was I; who should have been thy friend, thy tool;
Gone wooing with thee, stood at thy bed-side
Serving, and welcomed duteously thy bride.

But, as we are, we are—I will not say
Mere evil—women! Why must thou to-day
Turn strange, and make thee like some evil thing,
Childish, to meet my childish passioning?
See, I surrender: and confess that then
I had bad thoughts, but now have turned again
And found my wiser mind. [*She claps her hands.*

Ho, children! Run
Quickly! Come hither, out into the sun,
[*The CHILDREN come from the house, followed
by their ATTENDANT.*

And greet your father. Welcome him with us,
And throw quite, quite away, as mother does,
Your anger against one so dear. Our peace
Is made, and all the old bad war shall cease
For ever.—Go, and take his hand. . . .

[*As the CHILDREN go to JASON, she suddenly
bursts into tears. The CHILDREN quickly
return to her: she recovers herself, smiling
amid her tears.*

Ah me,
I am full of hidden horrors! . . . Shall it be
A long time more, my children, that ye live
To reach to me those dear, dear arms? . . . Forgive!
I am so ready with my tears to-day,
And full of dread. . . . I sought to smooth away
The long strife with your father, and, lo, now
I have all drowned with tears this little brow!

[*She wipes the child's face.*

LEADER.

O'er mine eyes too there stealeth a pale tear:
Let the evil rest, O God, let it rest here!

JASON.

Woman, indeed I praise thee now, nor say
Ill of thine other hour. 'Tis nature's way,
A woman needs must stir herself to wrath,
When work of marriage by so strange a path
Crosseth her lord. But thou, thine heart doth wend
The happier road. Thou hast seen, ere quite the
end,

What choice must needs be stronger: which to do
Shows a wise-minded woman. . . . And for you,
Children; your father never has forgot
Your needs. If God but help him, he hath
wrought

A strong deliverance for your weakness. Yea,
I think you, with your brethren, yet one day
Shall be the mightiest voices in this land.
Do you grow tall and strong. Your father's hand
Guideth all else, and whatso power divine
Hath alway helped him. . . . Ah, may it be mine
To see you yet in manhood, stern of brow,
Strong-armed, set high o'er those that hate me. . . .
How?

Woman, thy face is turned. Thy cheek is swept
With pallor of strange tears. Dost not accept
Gladly and of good will my benisons?

MEDEA.

'Tis nothing. Thinking of these little ones. . .

JASON.

Take heart, then. I will guard them from all ill.

MEDEA.

I do take heart. Thy word I never will
Mistrust. Alas, a woman's bosom bears
But woman's courage, a thing born for tears.

JASON.

What ails thee?—All too sore thou weepest there.

MEDEA.

I was their mother! When I heard thy prayer
Of long life for them, there swept over me
A horror, wondering how these things shall be.

But for the matter of my need that thou
Should speak with me, part I have said, and now
Will finish.—Seeing it is the king's behest
To cast me out from Corinth . . . aye, and best,
Far best, for me—I know it—not to stay
Longer to trouble thee and those who sway
The realm, being held to all their house a foe. . . .
Behold, I spread my sails, and meekly go

To exile. But our children. . . . Could this land
Be still their home awhile: could thine own hand
But guide their boyhood. . . . Seek the king, and
 pray
His pity, that he bid thy children stay!

JASON.

He is hard to move. Yet surely 'twere well done.

MEDEA.

Bid her—for thy sake, for a daughter's boon. . . .

JASON.

Well thought! Her I can fashion to my mind.

MEDEA.

Surely. She is a woman like her kind. . . .
Yet I will aid thee in thy labour; I
Will send her gifts, the fairest gifts that lie
In the hands of men, things of the days of old,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold,
By the boys' hands.—Go, quick, some handmaiden,
And fetch the raiment.

[*A handmaid goes into the house*

Ah, her cup shall then

Be filled indeed! What more should woman crave,
Being wed with thee, the bravest of the brave,

And girt with raiment which of old the sire
Of all my house, the Sun, gave, steeped in fire,
To his own fiery race?

[*The handmaid has returned bearing the Gifts.*

Come, children, lift
With heed these caskets. Bear them as your gift
To her, being bride and princess and of right
Blessed!--I think she will not hold them light.

JASON.

Fond woman, why wilt empty thus thine hand
Of treasure? Doth King Creon's castle stand
In stint of raiment, or in stint of gold?
Keep these, and make no gift. For if she hold
Jason of any worth at all, I swear
Chattels like these will not weigh more with her.

MEDEA.

Ah, chide me not! 'Tis written, gifts persuade
The gods in heaven; and gold is stronger made
Than words innumerable to bend men's ways.
Fortune is hers. God maketh great her days:
Young and a crownèd queen! And banishment
For those two babes. . . . I would not gold were
spent,
But life's blood, ere that come.

My children, go
Forth into those rich halls, and, bowing low,
Beseech your father's bride, whom I obey,
Ye be not, of her mercy, cast away

Exiled : and give the caskets—above all
 Mark this!—to none but her, to hold withal
 And keep. . . . Go quick! And let your mother
 know

Soon the good tiding that she longs for. . . . Go!

*[She goes quickly into the house. JASON and
 the CHILDREN with their ATTENDANT
 depart.]*

CHORUS.

Now I have no hope more of the children's living;
 No hope more. They are gone forth unto death.
 The bride, she taketh the poison of their giving:
 She taketh the bounden gold and openeth;
 And the crown, the crown, she lifteth about her brow,
 Where the light brown curls are clustering. No
 hope now!

O sweet and cloudy gleam of the garments golden!
 The robe, it hath clasped her breast and the crown
 her head.
 Then, then, she decketh the bride, as a bride of
 olden
 Story, that goeth pale to the kiss of the dead.
 For the ring hath closed, and the portion of death
 is there;
 And she flieth not, but perisheth unaware.

Some Women.

O bridegroom, bridegroom of the kiss so cold,
 Art thou wed with princes, art thou girt with gold,

Who know'st not, suing
For thy child's undoing,
And, on her thou lovest, for a doom untold?
How art thou fallen from thy place of old!

Others.

O Mother, Mother, what hast thou to reap,
When the harvest cometh, between wake and sleep?
For a heart unslaken,
For a troth forsaken,
Lo, babes that call thee from a bloody deep:
And thy love returns not. Get thee forth and weep!
[*Enter the ATTENDANT with the two*
CHILDREN: MEDEA comes out from
the house.

ATTENDANT.

Mistress, these children from their banishment
Are spared. The royal bride hath mildly bent
Her hand to accept thy gifts, and all is now
Peace for the children.—Ha, why standest thou
Confounded, when good fortune draweth near?

MEDEA.

Ah God!

ATTENDANT.

This chimes not with the news I bear.

MEDEA.

O God, have mercy!

ATTENDANT.

Is some word of wrath
Here hidden that I knew not of? And hath
My hope to give thee joy so cheated me?

MEDEA.

Thou givest what thou givest: I blame not thee.

ATTENDANT.

Thy brows are all o'ercast: thine eyes are filled. . . .

MEDEA.

For bitter need, Old Man! The gods have willed,
And my own evil mind, that this should come.

ATTENDANT.

Take heart! Thy sons one day will bring thee home.

MEDEA.

Home? . . . I have others to send home. Woe's me!

ATTENDANT.

Be patient. Many a mother before thee
Hath parted from her children. We poor things
Of men must needs endure what fortune brings.

MEDEA.

I will endure.—Go thou within, and lay
All ready that my sons may need to-day.

[*The ATTENDANT goes into the house.*]

O children, children mine: and you have found
A land and home, where, leaving me discrowned
And desolate, forever you will stay,
Motherless children! And I go my way
To other lands, an exile, ere you bring
Your fruits home, ere I see you prospering
Or know your brides, or deck the bridal bed,
All flowers, and lift your torches overhead.

Oh, cursèd be mine own hard heart! 'Twas all
In vain, then, that I reared you up, so tall
And fair; in vain I bore you, and was torn
With those long pitiless pains, when you were
born.

Ah, wondrous hopes my poor heart had in you,
How you would tend me in mine age, and do
The shroud about me with your own dear hands,
When I lay cold, blessèd in all the lands
That knew us. And that gentle thought is dead!
You go, and I live on, to eat the bread
Of long years, to myself most full of pain.
And never your dear eyes, never again,
Shall see your mother, far away being thrown
To other shapes of life. . . . My babes, my own,
Why gaze ye so?—What is it that ye see?—
And laugh with that last laughter? . . . Woe is me,
What shall I do?

Women, my strength is gone,
Gone like a dream, since once I looked upon

Those shining faces. . . . I can do it not.
 Good-bye to all the thoughts that burned so hot
 Aforetime! I will take and hide them far,
 Far, from men's eyes. Why should I seek a war
 So blind: by these babes' wounds to sting again
 Their father's heart, and win myself a pain
 Twice deeper? Never, never! I forget
 Henceforward all I laboured for.

And yet,
 What is it with me? Would I be a thing
 Mocked at, and leave mine enemies to sting
 Unsmitten? It must be. O coward heart,
 Ever to harbour such soft words!—Depart
 Out of my sight, ye twain. [*The CHILDREN go in.*]

And they whose eyes
 Shall hold it sin to share my sacrifice,
 On their heads be it! My hand shall swerve not now.

Ah, Ah, thou Wrath within me! Do not thou,
 Do not. . . . Down, down, thou tortured thing, and
 spare
 My children! They will dwell with us, aye, there
 Far off, and give thee peace.

Too late, too late!
 By all Hell's living agonies of hate,
 They shall not take my little ones alive
 To make their mock with! Howsoe'er I strive
 The thing is doomed; it shall not escape now
 From being. Aye, the crown is on the brow,
 And the robe girt, and in the robe that high
 Queen dying.

I know all. Yet . . . seeing that I

Must go so long a journey, and these twain
A longer yet and darker, I would fain
Speak with them, ere I go.

[*A handmaid brings the CHILDREN out again.*

Come, children; stand
A little from me. There. Reach out your hand,
Your right hand—so—to mother: and good-bye!

[*She has kept them hitherto at arm's length.
but at the touch of their hands, her resolution
breaks down, and she gathers them
passionately into her arms.*

Oh, darling hand! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,
And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,
May you be blessèd, but not here! What here
Was yours, your father stole. . . . Ah God, the glow
Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch; and Oh,
Sweet scent of childhood. . . . Go! Go! . . . Am I
blind? . . .

Mine eyes can see not, when I look to find
Their places. I am broken by the wings
Of evil. . . Yea, I know to what bad things
I go, but louder than all thought doth cry
Anger, which maketh man's worst misery.

[*She follows the CHILDREN into the house.*

CHORUS.

My thoughts have roamed a cloudy land,
And heard a fierier music fall
Than woman's heart should stir withal:
And yet some Muse majestic,
Unknown, hath hold of woman's hand
Seeking for Wisdom—not in all:

A feeble seed, a scattered band,
Thou yet shalt find in lonely places,
Not dead amongst us, nor our faces
Turned away from the Muses' call.

And thus my thought would speak: that she
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known
Is nearer to felicity:
Unlit she goeth and alone,
With little understanding what
A child's touch means of joy or woe,
And many toils she beareth not.

But they within whose garden fair
That gentle plant hath blown, they go
Deep-written all their days with care--
To rear the children, to make fast
Their hold, to win them wealth; and then
Much darkness, if the seed at last
Bear fruit in good or evil men!
And one thing at the end of all
Abideth, that which all men dread:
The wealth is won, the limbs are bred
To manhood, and the heart withal
Honest: and, lo, where Fortune smiled,
Some change, and what hath fallen? Hark!
'Tis death slow winging to the dark,
And in his arms what was thy child.

What therefore doth it bring of gain
To man, whose cup stood full before,

That God should send this one thing more
Of hunger and of dread, a door
Set wide to every wind of pain?

[MEDEA comes out alone from the house.]

MEDEA.

Friends, this long hour I wait on Fortune's eyes,
And strain my senses in a hot surmise
What passeth on that hill.—Ha! even now
There comes . . . 'tis one of Jason's men, I trow.
His wild-perturbèd breath doth warrant me
The tidings of some strange calamity

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.

O dire and ghastly deed! Get thee away,
Medea! Fly! Nor let behind thee stay
One chariot's wing, one keel that sweeps the seas. . . .

MEDEA.

And what hath chanced, to cause such flights as these?

MESSENGER.

The maiden princess lieth—and her sire,
The king—both murdered by thy poison-fire.

MEDEA.

Most happy tiding! Which thy name prefers
Henceforth among my friends and well-wishers.

MESSENGER.

What say'st thou? Woman, is thy mind within
Clear, and not raving? Thou art found in sin
Most bloody wrought against the king's high head,
And laughest at the tale, and hast no dread?

MEDEA.

I have words also that could answer well
Thy word. But take thine ease, good friend, and tell,
How died they? Hath it been a very foul
Death, prithee? That were comfort to my soul.

MESSENGER.

When thy two children, hand in hand entwined,
Came with their father, and passed on to find
The new-made bridal rooms, Oh, we were glad,
We thralls, who ever loved thee well, and had
Grief in thy grief. And straight there passed a word
From ear to ear, that thou and thy false lord
Had poured peace offering upon wrath foregone.
A right glad welcome gave we them, and one
Kissed the small hand, and one the shining hair:
Myself, for very joy, I followed where
The women's rooms are. There our mistress . . . she
Whom now we name so . . . thinking not to see
Thy little pair, with glad and eager brow
Sate waiting Jason. Then she saw, and slow
Shrouded her eyes, and backward turned again,
Sick that thy children should come near her. Then

Thy husband quick went forward, to entreat
The young maid's fitful wrath. "Thou will not
meet

Love's coming with unkindness? Nay, refrain
Thy suddenness, and turn thy face again,
Holding as friends all that to me are dear,
Thine husband. And accept these robes they bear
As gifts: and beg thy father to unmake
His doom of exile on them—for my sake."

When once she saw the raiment, she could still
Her joy no more, but gave him all his will.

And almost ere the father and the two

Children were gone from out the room, she drew
The flowerèd garments forth, and sate her down

To her arraying: bound the golden crown

Through her long curls, and in a mirror fair

Arranged their separate clusters, smiling there

At the dead self that faced her. Then aside

She pushed her seat, and paced those chambers
wide

Alone, her white foot poising delicately—

So passing joyful in those gifts was she!—

And many a time would pause, straight-limbed, and
wheel

Her head to watch the long fold to her heel

Sweeping. And then came something strange. Her
cheek

Seemed pale, and back with crooked steps and weak

Groping of arms she walked, and scarcely found

Her old seat, that she fell not to the ground.

Among the handmaids was a woman old

And grey, who deemed, I think, that Pan had hold

Upon her, or some spirit, and raised a keen
 Awakening shout; till through her lips was seen
 A white foam crawling, and her eyeballs back
 Twisted, and all her face dead pale for lack
 Of life: and while that old dame called, the cry
 Turned strangely to its opposite, to die
 Sobbing. Oh, swiftly then one woman flew
 To seek her father's rooms, one for the new
 Bridegroom, to tell the tale. And all the place
 Was loud with hurrying feet.

So long a space

As a swift walker on a measured way
 Would pace a furlong's course in, there she lay
 Speechless, with veiled lids. Then wide her eyes
 She oped, and wildly, as she strove to rise,
 Shrieked: for two diverse waves upon her rolled
 Of stabbing death. The carcanet of gold
 That gripped her brow was molten in a dire
 And wondrous river of devouring fire.
 And those fine robes, the gift thy children gave—
 God's mercy!—everywhere did lap and lave
 The delicate flesh; till up she sprang, and fled,
 A fiery pillar, shaking locks and head
 This way and that, seeking to cast the crown
 Somewhere away. But like a thing nailed down
 The burning gold held fast the anadem,
 And through her locks, the more she scattered
 them,
 Came fire the fiercer, till to earth she fell
 A thing—save to her sire—scarce nameable,
 And strove no more. That cheek of royal mien,
 Where was it—or the place where eyes had been?

Only from crown and temples came faint blood
Shot through with fire. The very flesh, it stood
Out from the bones, as from a wounded pine
The gum starts, where those gnawing poisons fine
Bit in the dark—a ghastly sight! And touch
The dead we durst not. We had seen too much.

But that poor father, knowing not, had sped,
Swift to his daughter's room, and there the dead
Lay at his feet. He knelt, and groaning low,
Folded her in his arms, and kissed her: "Oh,
Unhappy child, what thing unnatural hath
So hideously undone thee? Or what wrath
Of gods, to make this old grey sepulchre
Childless of thee? Would God but lay me there
To die with thee, my daughter!" So he cried.
But after, when he stayed from tears, and tried
To uplift his old bent frame, lo, in the folds
Of those fine robes it held, as ivy holds
Strangling among young laurel boughs. Oh, then
A ghastly struggle came! Again, again,
Up on his knee he writhed; but that dead breast
Clung still to his: till, wild, like one possessed,
He dragged himself half free; and, lo, the live
Flesh parted; and he laid him down to strive
No more with death, but perish; for the deep
Had risen above his soul. And there they sleep,
At last, the old proud father and the bride,
Even as his tears had craved it, side by side.

For thee—Oh, no word more! Thyself will know
How best to baffle vengeance. . . . Long ago
I looked upon man's days, and found a grey
Shadow. And this thing more I surely say,

That those of all men who are counted wise,
Strong wits, devisers of great policies,
Do pay the bitterest toll. Since life began,
Hath there in God's eye stood one happy man?
Fair days roll on, and bear more gifts or less
Of fortune, but to no man happiness.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Wrath upon wrath, meseems, this day shall fall
From God on Jason! He hath earned it all.

Other Women.

O miserable maiden, all my heart
Is torn for thee, so sudden to depart
From thy king's chambers and the light above
To darkness, all for sake of Jason's love!

MEDEA.

Women, my mind is clear. I go to slay
My children with all speed, and then, away
From hence; not wait yet longer till they stand
Beneath another and an angrier hand
To die. Yea, howsoe'er I shield them, die
They must. And, seeing that they must, 'tis I
Shall slay them, I their mother, touched of none
Beside. Oh, up and get thine armour on,

My heart! Why longer tarry we to win
Our crown of dire inevitable sin?
Take up thy sword, O poor right hand of mine,
Thy sword: then onward to the thin-drawn line
Where life turns agony. Let there be naught
Of softness now: and keep thee from that thought,
'Born of thy flesh,' 'thine own belovèd.' Now,
For one brief day, forget thy children: thou
Shalt weep hereafter. Though thou slay them, yet
Sweet were they. . . . I am sore unfortunate.
[*She goes into the house.*]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

O Earth, our mother; and thou
All-seër, arrowy crown
Of Sunlight, manward now
Look down, Oh, look down!
Look upon one accurst,
Ere yet in blood she twine
Red hands—blood that is thine!
O Sun, save her first!
She is thy daughter still,
Of thine own golden line;
Save her! Or shall man spill
The life divine?

Give peace, O Fire that diest not! Send thy spell
To stay her yet, to lift her afar, afar—
A torture-changèd spirit, a voice of Hell
Wrought of old wrongs and war!

Others.

Alas for the mother's pain
 Wasted! Alas the dear
 Life that was born in vain!
 Woman, what mak'st thou here,
 Thou from beyond the Gate
 Where dim Symplêgades
 Clash in the dark blue seas,
 The shores where death doth wait?
 Why hast thou taken on thee,
 To make us desolate,
 This anger of misery
 And guilt of hate?
 For fierce are the smitings back of blood once shed
 Where love hath been: God's wrath upon them that
 kill,
 And an anguished earth, and the wonder of the dead
 Haunting as music still. . . .
[A cry is heard within.]

A Woman.

Hark! Did ye hear? Heard ye the children's cry?

Another.

O miserable woman! O abhorred!

A Child within.

What shall I do? What is it? Keep me fast
 From mother!

The Other Child.

I know nothing. Brother! Oh,
 I think she means to kill us.

A Woman.

Let me go!

I will—Help! Help!—and save them at the last.

A Child.

Yes, in God's name! Help quickly ere we die!

The Other Child.

She has almost caught me now. She has a sword.

[Many of the Women are now beating at the barred door to get in. Others are standing apart.]

Women at the door.

Thou stone, thou thing of iron! Wilt verily
Spill with thine hand that life, the vintage stored
Of thine own agony?

The Other Women.

A Mother slew her babes in days of yore,
One, only one, from dawn to eventide,
Ino, god-maddened, whom the Queen of Heaven
Set frenzied, flying to the dark: and she
Cast her for sorrow to the wide salt sea,
Forth from those rooms of murder unforgiven,
Wild-footed from a white crag of the shore,
And clasping still her children twain, she died.

O Love of Woman, charged with sorrow sore,
What hast thou wrought upon us? What beside
Resteth to tremble for?

[Enter hurriedly JASON and Attendants.]

JASON.

Ye women by this doorway clustering
Speak, is the doer of the ghastly thing
Yet here, or fled? What hopeth she of flight?
Shall the deep yawn to shield her? Shall the height
Send wings, and hide her in the vaulted sky
To work red murder on her lords, and fly
Unrecompensed? But let her go! My care
Is but to save my children, not for her.
Let them she wronged requite her as they may.
I care not. 'Tis my sons I must some way
Save, ere the kinsmen of the dead can win
From them the payment of their mother's sin.

LEADER.

Unhappy man, indeed thou knowest not
What dark place thou art come to! Else, God wot,
Jason, no word like these could fall from thee.

JASON.

What is it?—Ha! The woman would kill me?

LEADER.

Thy sons are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

JASON.

How? Not the children. . . . I scarce under-
stand. . . .
O God, thou hast broken me!

LEADER.

Think of those twain
As things once fair, that ne'er shall bloom again.

JASON.

Where did she murder them? In that old room?

LEADER.

Open, and thou shalt see thy children's doom.

JASON.

Ho, thralls! Unloose me yonder bars! Make more
Of speed! Wrench out the jointing of the door.
And show my two-edged curse, the children dead,
The woman. . . . Oh, this sword upon her
head. . . .

*[While the Attendants are still battering at
the door MEDEA appears on the roof,
standing on a chariot of winged Dragons,
in which are the children's bodies.]*

MEDEA.

What make ye at my gates? Why batter ye
With brazen bars, seeking the dead and me
Who slew them? Peace! . . . And thou, if aught
of mine

Thou needest, speak, though never touch of thine

Shall scathe me more. Out of his firmament
 My fathers' father, the high Sun, hath sent
 This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.

JASON.

Thou living hate! Thou wife in every age
 Abhorred, blood-red mother, who didst kill
 My sons, and make me as the dead: and still
 Canst take the sunshine to thine eyes, and smell
 The green earth, reeking from thy deed of hell;
 I curse thee! Now, Oh, now mine eyes can see,
 That then were blinded, when from savagery
 Of eastern chambers, from a cruel land,
 To Greece and home I gathered in mine hand
 Thee, thou incarnate curse: one that betrayed
 Her home, her father, her . . . Oh, God hath laid
 Thy sins on me!—I knew, I knew, there lay
 A brother murdered on thy hearth that day
 When thy first footstep fell on Argo's hull. . . .
 Argo, my own, my swift and beautiful!

That was her first beginning. Then a wife
 I made her in my house. She bore to life
 Children: and now for love, for chambering
 And men's arms, she hath murdered them! A
 thing

Not one of all the maids of Greece, not one,
 Had dreamed of; whom I spurned, and for mine
 own

Chose thee, a bride of hate to me and death,
 Tigress, not woman, beast of wilder breath

Than Skylla shrieking o'er the Tuscan sea.
Enough! No scorn of mine can reach to thee,
Such iron is o'er thine eyes. Out from my road,
'Thou crime-begetter, blind with children's blood!
And let me weep alone the bitter tide
That sweepeth Jason's days, no gentle bride
To speak with more, no child to look upon
Whom once I reared . . . all, all for ever gone!

MEDEA.

An easy answer had I to this swell
Of speech, but Zeus our father knoweth well,
All I for thee have wrought, and thou for me.
So let it rest. This thing was not to be,
That thou shouldst live a merry life, my bed
Forgotten and my heart uncomforted,
Thou nor thy princess: nor the king that planned
Thy marriage drive Medea from his land,
And suffer not. Call me what thing thou please,
Tigress or Skylla from the Tuscan seas:
My claws have gripped thine heart, and all things
shine.

JASON.

Thou too hast grief. Thy pain is fierce as mine.

MEDEA.

I love the pain, so thou shalt laugh no more.

JASON.

Oh, what a womb of sin my children bore!

EURIPIDES

MEDEA.

Sons, did ye perish for your father's shame?

JASON.

How? It was not my hand that murdered them.

MEDEA

'Twas thy false wooings, 'twas thy trampling pride.

JASON.

Thou hast said it! For thy lust of love they died.

MEDEA.

And love to women a slight thing should be?

JASON.

To women pure!—All thy vile life to thee!

MEDEA.

Think of thy torment. They are dead, they are dead!

JASON.

No: quick, great God; quick curses round thy head!

MEDEA.

The Gods know who began this work of woe.

JASON.

Thy heart and all its loathliness they know.

MEDEA.

Loathe on. . . . But, Oh, thy voice. It hurts me
sore.

JASON.

Aye, and thine me. Wouldst hear me then no more?

MEDEA.

How? Show me but the way. 'Tis this I crave.

JASON.

Give me the dead to weep, and make their grave.

MEDEA.

Never! Myself will lay them in a still
Green sepulchre, where Hera by the Hill
Hath precinct holy, that no angry men
May break their graves and cast them forth again
To evil. So I lay on all this shore
Of Corinth a high feast for evermore
And rite, to purge them yearly of the stain
Of this poor blood. And I, to Pallas' plain
I go, to dwell beside Pandion's son,
Aegeus.—For thee, behold, death draweth on,
Evil and lonely, like thine heart: the hands
Of thine old Argo, rotting where she stands,

Shall smite thine head in twain, and bitter be
To the last end thy memories of me.

[She rises on the chariot and is slowly borne away.]

JASON.

May They that hear the weeping child
Blast thee, and They that walk in blood!

MEDEA.

Thy broken vows, thy friends beguiled
Have shut for thee the ears of God.

JASON.

Go, thou art wet with children's tears!

MEDEA.

Go thou, and lay thy bride to sleep.

JASON.

Childless, I go, to weep and weep.

MEDEA.

Not yet! Age cometh and long years.

JASON.

My sons, mine own!

MEDEA.

Not thine, but mine . . .

JASON.

. . Who slew them!

MEDEA.

Yes: to torture thee.

JASON.

Once let me kiss their lips, once twine
Mine arms and touch. . . . Ah, woe is me!

MEDEA.

Wouldst love them and entreat? But now
They were as nothing.

JASON.

At the last,
O God, to touch that tender brow!

MEDEA.

Thy words upon the wind are cast.

JASON.

Thou, Zeus, wilt hear me. All is said
For naught. I am but spurned away
And trampled by this tigress, red
With children's blood. Yet, come what may,
So far as thou hast granted, yea,
So far as yet my strength may stand,
I weep upon these dead, and say
Their last farewell, and raise my hand

To all the daemons of the air
In witness of these things; how she
Who slew them, will not suffer me
To gather up my babes, nor bear
To earth their bodies; whom, O stone
Of women, would I ne'er had known
Nor gotten, to be slain by thee!

[He casts himself upon the earth.]

CHORUS.

Great treasure halls hath Zeus in heaven,
From whence to man strange dooms be given,
 Past hope or fear.
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought:
 So hath it fallen here.

NOTES TO MEDEA

P. 3, l. 2, To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades.]—The Symplêgades ("Clashing") or Kuaneai ("Dark blue") were two rocks in the sea which used to clash together and crush anything that was between them. They stood above the north end of the Bosphorus and formed the Gate (l. 1264, p. 70) to the Axeinos Pontos, or "Stranger-less Sea," where all Greeks were murdered. At the farthest eastern end of that sea was the land of Colchis.

P. 3, l. 3, Pêlion.]—The great mountain in Thessaly. Iôlcos, a little kingdom between Pêlion and the sea, ruled originally by Aeson, Jason's father, then by the usurping Pêlias.

P. 3, l. 9, Daughters of Pêlias.]—See Introduction, p. vii.

P. 4, l. 18, Wed.]—Medea was not legally married to Jason, and could not be, though in common parlance he is sometimes called her husband. Inter-marriage between the subjects of two separate states was not possible in antiquity without a special treaty. And naturally there was no such treaty with Colchis.

This is, I think, the view of the play, and corresponds to the normal Athenian conceptions of society. In the original legend it is likely enough that Medea belongs to "matriarchal" times before the institution of marriage.

P. 4, l. 18, Head of Corinth.]—A peculiar word

(αἰσυνῶν) afterwards used to translate the Roman *dictator*. Creon is, however, apparently descended from the ancient king Sisyphus.

P. 4, l. 40, She hath a blade made keen, &c.]—These lines (40, 41) are repeated in a different context later on, p. 23, ll. 379, 380. The sword which to the Nurse suggested suicide was really meant for murder. There is a similar and equally dramatic repetition of the lines about the crown and wreath (786, 949, pp. 46, 54), and of those about the various characters popularly attributed to Medea (ll. 304, 808, pp. 18, 46).

P. 5, l. 48, ATTENDANT.]—Greek *Paidagōgos*, or “pedagogue”; a confidential servant who escorted the boys to and from school, and in similar ways looked after them. Notice the rather light and cynical character of this man, compared with the tenderness of the Nurse.

P. 5, l. 57, To this still earth and sky.]—Not a mere stage explanation. It was the ancient practice, if you had bad dreams or terrors of the night, to “show” them to the Sun in the morning, that he might clear them away.

P. 8, l. 111, Have I not suffered?]—Medea is apparently answering some would-be comforter. Cf. p. 4. (“If friends will speak,” &c.)

P. 9, l. 131, CHORUS.]—As Dr. Verrall has remarked, the presence of the Chorus is in this play unusually awkward from the dramatic point of view. Medea’s plot demands most absolute secrecy; and it is incredible that fifteen Corinthian women, simply because they were women, should allow a half-mad foreigner to murder several people, including their

own Corinthian king and princess—who was a woman also—rather than reveal her plot. We must remember in palliation (1) that these women belong to the faction in Corinth which was friendly to Medea and hostile to Creon; (2) that the appeal to them as women had more force in antiquity than it would now, and the princess had really turned traitor to her sex. (See note on this subject at the end of the present writer's translation of the *Electra*.) (3) The non-interference of the Chorus seems monstrous: yet in ancient times, when law was weak and punishment was chiefly the concern of the injured persons, and of no one else, the reluctance of bystanders to interfere was much greater than it is now in an ordered society. Some oriental countries, and perhaps even California or Texas, could afford us some startling instances of impassiveness among bystanders.

P. 12, l. 167, Oh, wild words!—The Nurse breaks in, hoping to drown her mistress's dangerous self-betrayal. Medea's murder of her brother (see Introduction, p. vi) was by ordinary standards her worst act, and seems not to have been known in Corinth. It forms the climax of Jason's denunciation, l. 1334, p. 74.

P. 13, l. 190, Alas, the brave blithe bards, &c.]—Who is the speaker? According to the MSS. the Nurse, and there is some difficulty in taking the lines from her. Yet (1) she has no reason to sing a song outside after saying that she is going in; and (2) it is quite necessary that she should take a little time indoors persuading Medea to come out. The words seem to suit the lips of an impersonal Chorus.

The general sense of the poem is interesting. It is

an apology for tragedy. It gives the tragic poet's conception of the place of his art in the service of humanity, as against the usual feeling of the public, whose serious work is devoted to something else, and who "go to a play to be amused."

P. 14, l. 214, Women of Corinth, I am come, &c.]—These opening lines are a well-known *crux interpretum*. It is interesting to note, (1) that the Roman poet Ennius (ca. 200 B.C.) who translated the *Medea*, did not understand them in the least; while, on the other hand, the earliest Greek commentators seem not to have noticed that there was any difficulty in them worth commenting upon. That implies that while the acting tradition was alive and unbroken, the lines were easily understood; but when once the tradition failed, the meaning was lost. (The first commentator who deals with the passage is Irenaeus, a scholar of the Augustan time.)

P. 15, l. 231, A herb most bruised is woman.]—This fine statement of the wrongs of women in Athens doubtless contains a great deal of the poet's own mind; but from the dramatic point of view it is justified in several ways. (1) Medea is seeking for a common ground on which to appeal to the Corinthian women. (2) She herself is now in the position of all others in which a woman is most hardly treated as compared with a man. (3) Besides this, one can see that, being a person of great powers and vehement will, she feels keenly her lack of outlet. If she had men's work to do, she could be a hero: debarred from proper action (from τὸ πράσσειν, *Hip.* 1019) she is bound to make mischief. Cf. p. 24, ll. 408, 409. "Things most vain, &c."

There is a slight anachronism in applying the Attic

system of doweries to primitive times. Medea's contemporaries either lived in a "matriarchal" system without any marriage, or else were bought by their husbands for so many cows.

P. 17, l. 271, CREON.]—Observe the somewhat archaic abruptness of this scene, a sign of the early date of the play.

P. 18, l. 295, Wise beyond men's wont.]—Medea was a "wise woman" which in her time meant much the same as a witch or enchantress. She did really know more than other women; but most of this extra knowledge consisted—or was supposed to consist—either in lore of poisons and charms, or in useless learning and speculation.

P. 18, l. 304, A seed of strife, an Eastern dreamer, &c.]—The meaning of these various "ill names" is not certain. Cf. l. 808, p. 46. Most scholars take *θατέρον τρόπον* ("of the other sort") to mean "the opposite of a dreamer."

P. 20, ll. 333–4, What would I with thy pains?]
A conceit almost in the Elizabethan style, as if by taking "pains" away from Creon, she would have them herself.

P. 20, l. 335, Not that! Not that!]
Observe what a dislike Medea has of being touched: cf. l. 370 ("my flesh been never stained," &c.) and l. 496 ("poor, poor right hand of mine!"), pp. 22, and 28.

P. 22, l. 364, Defeat on every side.]—Observe (1) that in this speech Medea's vengeance is to take the form of a clear fight to the death against the three guilty persons. It is both courageous and, judged by the appropriate standard, just. (2) She wants to save

her own life, not from cowardice, but simply to make her revenge more complete. To kill her enemies and escape is victory. To kill them and die with them is only a drawn battle. Other enemies will live and "laugh." (3) Already in this first soliloquy there is a suggestion of that strain of madness which becomes unmistakable later on in the play. ("Oh, I have tried so many thoughts of murder," &c., and especially the lashing of her own fury, "Awake thee now, Medea.")

P. 24, l. 405, Thief's daughter: lit. "a child of Sisyphus."—Sisyphus, an ancient king of Corinth, was one of the well-known sinners punished in Tartarus. Medea's father, Aiêtês, was a brother of Circe, and born of the Sun.

P. 24, l. 409, Things most vain for help.]—See on ll. 230 ff.

P. 24, ll. 410–430, CHORUS.]—The song celebrates the coming triumph of Woman in her rebellion against Man; not by any means Woman as typifying the domestic virtues, but rather as the downtrodden, uncivilised, unreasoning, and fiercely emotional half of humanity. A woman who in defence of her honour and her rights will die sword in hand, slaying the man who wronged her, seems to the Chorus like a deliverer of the whole sex.

P. 24, l. 421, Old bards.]—Early literature in most countries contains a good deal of heavy satire on women: *e.g.* Hesiod's "Who trusts a woman trusts a thief;" or Phocylides' "Two days of a woman are very sweet: when you marry her and when you carry her to her grave."

It is curious how the four main Choruses of the

Medea are divided each into two parts, distinct in subject and in metre.

P. 25, l. 439, Faith is no more sweet.]—Copied from a beautiful passage in Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 198 ff.: "There shall be no more sweetness found in the faithful man nor the righteous. . . . And at last up to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth, shrouding with white raiment their beautiful faces, go Ruth and Rebuking." (Aidos and Nemesis: *i.e.* the Ruth or Shame that you feel with reference to your own actions, and the Indignation or Disapproval that others feel.)

P. 27, ll. 478 ff., Bulls of fiery breath.]—Among the tasks set him by Aiêtês, Jason had to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, and plough with them a certain Field of Ares, sow the field with dragon's teeth, and reap a harvest of earth-born or giant warriors which sprang from the seed. When all this was done, there remained the ancient serpent coiled round the tree where the Golden Fleece was hanging.

P. 29, l. 507, The first friends who sheltered me.]—*i.e.* the kindred of Pelias.

P. 29, l. 509, Blest of many a maid in Hellas.]—Jason was, of course, the great romantic hero of his time. Cf. his own words, l. 1340, p. 74.

Pp. 29 ff., ll. 523–575.—Jason's defence is made the weaker by his reluctance to be definitely insulting to *Medea*. He dares not say: "You think that, because you conceived a violent passion for me,—to which, I admit, I partly responded—I must live with you always; but the truth is, you are a savage with whom a civilised man cannot go on living." This point

comes out unveiled in his later speech, l. 1329, ff., p. 74.

P. 30, ll. 536 ff., Our ordered life and justice.]—Jason has brought the benefits of civilisation to Medea! He is doubtless sincere, but the peculiar ironic cruelty of the plea is obvious.

P. 30, ll. 541 ff., The story of Great Medea, &c. . . . Unless our deeds have glory.]—This, I think, is absolutely sincere. To Jason ambition is everything. And, as Medea has largely shared his great deeds with him, he thinks that she cannot but feel the same. It seems to him contemptible that her mere craving for personal love should outweigh all the possible glories of life.

P. 31, l. 565, What more need hast thou of children?—He only means, “of more children than you now have.” But the words suggest to Medea a different meaning, and sow in her mind the first seed of the child-murder. See on the Aegeus scene below.

P. 34, l. 608, A living curse.]—Though she spoke no word, the existence of a being so deeply wronged would be a curse on her oppressors. So a murdered man’s blood, or an involuntary cry of pain (Aesch. *Ag.* 237) on the part of an injured person is in itself fraught with a curse.

P. 35, ll. 627–641, CHORUS. Alas, the Love, &c.]—A highly characteristic Euripidean poem, keenly observant of fact, yet with a lyrical note penetrating all its realism. A love which really produces “good to man and glory,” is treated in the next chorus, l. 844 ff., p. 49.

Pp. 37 ff., ll. 663–759, AEGEUS.¹—This scene is

generally considered to be a mere blot on the play, not, I think, justly. It is argued that the obvious purpose which the scene serves, the provision of an asylum for Medea, has no keen dramatic interest. The spectator would just as soon, or sooner, have her die. And, besides, her actual mode of escape is largely independent of Aegeus. Further, the arrival of Aegeus at this moment seems to be a mere coincidence (*Ar. Poetics*, 61 b, 23), and one cannot help suspecting that the Athenian poet was influenced by mere local interests in dragging in the Athenian king and the praises of Athens where they were not specially appropriate.

To these criticisms one may make some answer. (1) As to the coincidence, it is important to remember always that Greek tragedies are primarily historical plays, not works of fiction. They are based on definite *Logoi* or traditions (*Frogs*, l. 1052, p. 254) and therefore can, and should, represent accidental coincidences when it was a datum of the tradition that these coincidences actually happened. By Aristotle's time the practice had changed. The tragedies of his age were essentially fiction; and he tends to criticise the ancient tragedies by fictional standards.

Now it was certainly a datum in the Medea legend that she took refuge with Aegeus, King of Athens, and was afterwards an enemy to his son Theseus; but I think we may go further. This play pretty certainly has for its foundation the rites performed by the Corinthians at the Grave of the Children of Medea in the precinct of Hera Acraia near Corinth. See on l. 1379. p. 77. The legend in such cases is usually invented to

explain the ritual; and I suspect that in the ritual, and, consequently, in the legend, there were two other data: first, a pursuit of Medea and her flight on a dragon-chariot, and, secondly, a meeting between Medea and Aegeus. (Both subjects are frequent on vase paintings, and may well be derived from historical pictures in some temple at Corinth.)

Thus, the meeting with Aegeus is probably not the free invention of Euripides, but one of the data supplied to him by his subject. But he has made it serve, as von Arnim was the first to perceive, a remarkable dramatic purpose. Aegeus was under a curse of childlessness, and his desolate condition suggests to Medea the ultimate form of her vengeance. She will make Jason childless. Cf. l. 670, "Children! Ah God, art childless?" (A childless king in antiquity was a miserable object: likely to be deposed and dishonoured, and to miss his due worship after death. See the fragments of Euripides' *Oineus*.)

There is also a further purpose in the scene, of a curious and characteristic kind. In several plays of Euripides, when a heroine hesitates on the verge of a crime, the thing that drives her over the brink is some sudden and violent lowering of her self-respect. Thus Phædra writes her false letter immediately after her public shame. Cræusa in the *Ion* turns murderous only after crying in the god's ears the story of her seduction. Medea, a princess and, as we have seen, a woman of rather proud chastity, feels, after the offer which she makes to Aegeus in this scene (l. 716 ff., p. 42), that she need shrink from nothing.

P. 38, l. 681, The hearth-stone of my sires of yore.]

—This sounds as if it meant Aegeus' own house: in reality, by an oracular riddle, it meant the house of Pittheus, by whose daughter, Aethra, Aegeus became the father of Theseus.

P. 43, l. 731, An oath wherein to trust.]—Observe that Medea is deceiving Aegeus. She intends to commit a murder before going to him, and therefore wishes to bind him down so firmly that, however much he wish to repudiate her, he shall be unable. Hence this insistence on the oath and the exact form of the oath. (At this time, apparently, she scarcely thinks of the children, only of her revenge.)

P. 46, l. 808, No eastern dreamer, &c.]—See on l. 304.

P. 47, l. 820, *The NURSE comes out.*]—There is no indication in the original to show who comes out. But it is certainly a woman; as certainly it is not one of the Chorus; and Medea's words suit the Nurse well. It is an almost devilish act to send the Nurse, who would have died rather than take such a message had she understood it.

P. 48, ll. 824–846, The sons of Erechtheus, &c.]—This poem is interesting as showing the ideal conception of Athens entertained by a fifth-century Athenian. One might compare with it Pericles' famous speech in Thucydides, ii., where the emphasis is laid on Athenian "plain living and high thinking" and the freedom of daily life. Or, again, the speeches of Aethra in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where more stress is laid on mercy and championship of the oppressed.

The allegory of "Harmony," as a sort of Korê, or Earth-maiden, planted by all the Muses in the soil of Attica, seems to be an invention of the poet. Not any

given Art or Muse, but a spirit which unites and harmonises all, is the special spirit of Athens. The Attic connection with Erôs, on the other hand, is old and traditional. But Euripides has transformed the primitive nature-god into a mystic and passionate longing for "all manner of high deed," a Love which, different from that described in the preceding chorus, really ennobles human life.

This first part of the Chorus is, of course, suggested by Aegeus; the second is more closely connected with the action of the play. "How can Medea dream of asking that stainless land to shelter her crimes? But the whole plan of her revenge is not only wicked but impossible. She simply could not do such a thing, if she tried."

Pp. 50 ff., l. 869, The second scene with Jason.]—Dicæarchus, and perhaps his master Aristotle also, seems to have complained of Medea's bursting into tears in this scene, instead of acting her part consistently—a very prejudiced criticism. What strikes one about Medea's assumed rôle is that in it she remains so like herself and so unlike another woman. Had she really determined to yield to Jason, she would have done so in just this way, keen-sighted and yet passionate. One is reminded of the deceits of half-insane persons, which are due not so much to conscious art as to the emergence of another side of the personality.

P. 54, l. 949, Fine robings, &c.]—Repeated from l. 786, p. 46, where it came full in the midst of Medea's avowal of her murderous purpose. It startles one here, almost as though she had spoken out the word "murder" in some way which Jason could not understand.

P. 56, l. 976, CHORUS.]—The inaction of the Chorus women during the last scene will not bear thinking about, if we regard them as real human beings, like, for instance, the Bacchæ and the Trojan Women in the plays that bear their name. Still there is not only beauty, but, I think, great dramatic value in the conventional and almost mystical quality of this Chorus, and also in the low and quiet tone of that which follows, l. 1081 ff.

P. 59, ll. 1021 ff., Why does Medea kill her children?—She acts not for one clearly stated reason, like a heroine in Sardou, but for many reasons, both conscious and subconscious, as people do in real life. Any analysis professing to be exact would be misleading, but one may note some elements in her feeling: (1) She had played dangerously long with the notion of making Jason childless. (2) When she repented of this (l. 1046, p. 60) the children had already been made the unconscious murderers of the princess. They were certain to be slain, perhaps with tortures, by the royal kindred. (3) Medea might take them with her to Athens and trust to the hope of Aegeus' being able and willing to protect them. But it was a doubtful chance, and she would certainly be in a position of weakness and inferiority if she had the children to protect. (4) In the midst of her passionate half-animal love for the children, there was also an element of hatred, because they were Jason's: cf. l. 112, p. 8. (5) She also seems to feel, in a sort of wild-beast way, that by killing them she makes them more her own: cf. l. 793, p. 46, "Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away;" l. 1241, p. 68, "touched of none beside." (6)

Euripides had apparently observed how common it is, when a woman's mind is deranged by suffering, that her madness takes the form of child-murder. The terrible lines in which Medea speaks to the "Wrath" within her, as if it were a separate being (l. 1056, p. 60), seem to bear out this view.

P. 59, l. 1038, Other shapes of life.]—A mystical conception of death. Cf. *Ion*, 1067, where almost exactly the same phrase is used.

P. 61, l. 1078, I know to what bad deeds, &c.].—This expression of double consciousness was immensely famous in antiquity. It is quoted by Lucian, Plutarch, Clement, Galen, Synesius, Hierocles, Arrian, Simplicius, besides being imitated, *e.g.* by Ovid: "*video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor.*"

P. 63, l. 1123 ff., MESSENGER.]—A pendant to the Attendant's entrance above, l. 1002. The Attendant, bringing apparently good news, is received with a moan of despair, the Messenger of calamity with serene satisfaction. Cf. the Messenger who announces the death of Pentheus in the *Bacchæ*.

P. 65, l. 1162, Dead self.]—The reflection in the glass, often regarded as ominous or uncanny in some way.

P. 66, l. 1176, The cry turned strangely to its opposite.]—The notion was that an evil spirit could be scared away by loud cheerful shouts—*ololugæ*. But while this old woman is making an *ololugê*, she sees that the trouble is graver than she thought, and the cheerful cry turns into a wail.

P. 68, l. 1236, Women, my mind is clear.]—With the silence in which Medea passes over the success

of her vengeance compare Theseus' words, *Hip.*, l. 1260, "I laugh not, neither weep, at this fell doom."

P. 69, l. 1249, Thou shalt weep hereafter.]—Cf. *Othello*, v. ii., "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kiss thee, And love thee after."

P. 69, ll. 1251 ff.—This curious prayer to the Sun to "save" Medea—both from the crime of killing her children and the misfortune of being caught by her enemies—is apparently meant to prepare us for the scene of the Dragon Chariot. Notice the emphasis laid on the divine origin of Medea's race and her transformation to "a voice of Hell."

P. 71, ll. 1278 ff., Death of the children.]—The door is evidently barred, since Jason has to use crow-bars to open it in l. 1317. Cf. the end of Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles*.

P. 71, l. 1281, A mother slew her babes in days of yore, &c.]—Ino, wife of Athamas, King of Thebes, nursed the infant Dionysus. For this Hera punished her with madness. She killed her two children, Learchus and Melicertes, and leaped into the sea. (There are various versions of the story.)—Observe the technique: just as the strain is becoming intolerable, we are turned away from tragedy to pure poetry. See on *Hip.* 731.

P. 74, l. 1320, This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.]—There is nothing in the words of the play to show what "this" is, but the Scholiast explains it as a chariot drawn by winged serpents, and the stage tradition seems to be clear on the subject. See note to the Aegeus scene (p. 88).

This first appearance of Medea "above, on the

tower" (Scholiast) seems to me highly effective. The result is to make Medea into something like a *dea ex machina*, who prophesies and pronounces judgment. See Introduction.

P. 76, l. 1370, They are dead, they are dead!—This wrangle, though rather like some scenes in Norse sagas, is strangely discordant for a Greek play. It seems as if Euripides had deliberately departed from his usual soft and reflective style of ending in order to express the peculiar note of discord which is produced by the so-called "satisfaction" of revenge. Medea's curious cry: "Oh, thy voice! It hurts me sore!" shows that the effect is intentional.

P. 77, l. 1379, A still green sepulchre.]—There was a yearly festival in the precinct of Hera Acraia, near Corinth, celebrating the deaths of Medea's children. This festival, together with its ritual and "sacred legend," evidently forms the germ of the whole tragedy. Cf. the Trozenian rites over the tomb of Hippolytus, *Hip.* 1424 ff.

P. 77, l. 1386, The hands of thine old Argo.]—Jason, left friendless and avoided by his kind, went back to live with his old ship, now rotting on the shore. While he was sleeping under it, a beam of wood fell upon him and broke his head. It is a most grave mistake to treat the line as spurious.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

THE
TROJAN WOMEN
OF
EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE

WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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RAHWAY, N. J.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

IN his clear preface, Gilbert Murray says with truth that *The Trojan Women*, valued by the usage of the stage, is not a perfect play. "It is only the crying of one of the great wrongs of the world wrought into music." Yet it is one of the greater dramas of the elder world. In one situation, with little movement, with few figures, it flashes out a great dramatic lesson, the infinite pathos of a successful wrong. It has in it the very soul of the tragic. It even goes beyond the limited tragic, and hints that beyond the defeat may come a greater glory than will be the fortune of the victors. And thus through its pity and terror it purifies our souls to thoughts of peace.

Great art has no limits of locality or time. Its tidings are timeless, and its messages are universal. *The Trojan Women* was first performed in 415 B.C., from a story of the siege of Troy which even then was ancient history. But the pathos of it is as modern to us as it was to the Athenians. The terrors of war have not changed in three thousand years. Euripides had that to say of war which we have to say of it to-day, and had learned that which we are even now learning, that when most triumphant it brings as much wretchedness to the victors as to the vanquished. In this play the great conquest "seems to be a great joy and is in truth a great misery." The

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tragedy of war has in no essential altered. The god Poseidon mourns over Troy as he might over the cities of to-day, when he cries:

“How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!”

To the cities of this present day might the prophetess Cassandra speak her message:

“Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!”

A throb of human sympathy as if with one of our sisters of to-day comes to us at the end, when the city is destroyed and its queen would throw herself, living, into its flames. To be of the action of this play the imagination needs not to travel back over three thousand years of history. It can simply leap a thousand leagues of ocean.

If ever wars are to be ended, the imagination of man must end them. To the common mind, in spite of all its horrors, there is still something glorious in war. Preachers have preached against it in vain; economists have argued against its wastefulness in vain. The imagination of a great poet alone can finally show to the imagination of the world that even the glories of war are an empty delusion. Euripides shows us, as the centre of his drama,

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women battered and broken by inconceivable torture—the widowed Hecuba, Andromache with her child dashed to death, Cassandra ravished and made mad—yet does he show that theirs are the unconquered and unconquerable spirits. The victorious men, flushed with pride, have remorse and mockery dealt out to them by those they fought for, and go forth to unpitied death. Never surely can a great tragedy seem more real to us, or purge our souls more truly of the unreality of our thoughts and feelings concerning vital issues, than can *The Trojan Women* at this moment of the history of the world.

FRANCIS HOVEY STODDARD.

May the first, 1915.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

JUDGED by common standards, the *Troädes* is far from a perfect play; it is scarcely even a good play. It is an intense study of one great situation, with little plot, little construction, little or no relief or variety. The only movement of the drama is a gradual extinguishing of all the familiar lights of human life, with, perhaps, at the end, a suggestion that in the utterness of night, when all fears of a possible worse thing are passed, there is in some sense peace and even glory. But the situation itself has at least this dramatic value, that it is different from what it seems.

The consummation of a great conquest, a thing celebrated in paeans and thanksgivings, the very height of the day-dreams of unregenerate man—it seems to be a great joy, and it is in truth a great misery. It is conquest seen when the thrill of battle is over, and nothing remains but to wait and think. We feel in the background the presence of the conquerors, sinister and disappointed phantoms; of the conquered men, after long torment, now resting in death. But the living drama for Euripides lay in the conquered women. It is from them that he has named his play and built up his scheme of parts: four figures clearly lit and heroic, the others in varying grades of characterisation, nameless and barely articulate, mere half-heard voices of an eternal sorrow.

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Indeed, the most usual condemnation of the play is not that it is dull, but that it is too harrowing; that scene after scene passes beyond the due limits of tragic art. There are points to be pleaded against this criticism. The very beauty of the most fearful scenes, in spite of their fearfulness, is one; the quick comfort of the lyrics is another, falling like a spell of peace when the strain is too hard to bear (cf. p. 89). But the main defence is that, like many of the greatest works of art, the *Troädes* is something more than art. It is also a prophecy, a bearing of witness. And the prophet, bound to deliver his message, walks outside the regular ways of the artist.

For some time before the *Troädes* was produced, Athens, now entirely in the hands of the War Party, had been engaged in an enterprise which, though on military grounds defensible, was bitterly resented by the more humane minority, and has been selected by Thucydides as the great crucial crime of the war. She had succeeded in compelling the neutral Dorian island of Mêlos to take up arms against her, and after a long siege had conquered the quiet and immemorably ancient town, massacred the men and sold the women and children into slavery. Mêlos fell in the autumn of 416 B.C. The *Troädes* was produced in the following spring. And while the gods of the prologue were prophesying destruction at sea for the sackers of Troy, the fleet of the sackers of Mêlos, flushed with conquest and marked by a slight but unforgettable taint of sacrilege, was actually preparing to set sail for its fatal enterprise against Sicily.

Not, of course, that we have in the *Troädes* a case of political allusion. Far from it. Euripides does not

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mean Mêlos when he says Troy, nor mean Alcibiades' fleet when he speaks of Agamemnon's. But he writes under the influence of a year which to him, as to Thucydides, had been filled full of indignant pity and of dire foreboding. This tragedy is perhaps, in European literature, the first great expression of the spirit of pity for mankind exalted into a moving principle; a principle which has made the most precious, and possibly the most destructive, elements of innumerable rebellions, revolutions, and martyrdoms, and of at least two great religions.

Pity is a rebel passion. Its hand is against the strong, against the organised force of society, against conventional sanctions and accepted Gods. It is the Kingdom of Heaven within us fighting against the brute powers of the world; and it is apt to have those qualities of unreason, of contempt for the counting of costs and the balancing of sacrifices, of recklessness, and even, in the last resort, of ruthlessness, which so often mark the paths of heavenly things and the doings of the children of light. It brings not peace, but a sword.

So it was with Euripides. The *Troädes* itself has indeed almost no fierceness and singularly little thought of revenge. It is only the crying of one of the great wrongs of the world wrought into music, as it were, and made beautiful by "the most tragic of the poets." But its author lived ever after in a deepening atmosphere of strife and even of hatred, down to the day when, "because almost all in Athens rejoiced at his suffering," he took his way to the remote valleys of Macedon to write the *Bacchae* and to die.

G. M.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THE GOD POSEIDON.

THE GODDESS PALLAS ATHENA.

HECUBA, *Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hector and Paris.*

CASSANDRA, *daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess.*

ANDROMACHE, *wife of Hector, Prince of Troy.*

HELEN, *wife of Menelaüs, King of Sparta; carried off by Paris, Prince of Troy.*

TALTHYBIUS, *Herald of the Greeks.*

MENELAUS, *King of Sparta, and, together with his brother Agamemnon, General of the Greeks.*

SOLDIERS ATTENDANT ON TALTHYBIUS AND MENELAUS.

CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN, YOUNG AND OLD,
MAIDEN AND MARRIED.

The Troädes was first acted in the year 415 B.C. "The first prize was won by Xenocles, whoever he may have been, with the four plays Oedipus, Lycaön, Bacchae and Athamas, a Satyr-play. The second by Euripides with the Alexander, Palamêdês, Troädes and Sisyphus, a Satyr-play."—AELIAN, Varia Historia, ii. 8.

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The scene represents a battlefield, a few days after the battle. At the back are the walls of Troy, partially ruined. In front of them, to right and left, are some huts, containing those of the Captive Women who have been specially set apart for the chief Greek leaders. At one side some dead bodies of armed men are visible. In front a tall woman with white hair is lying on the ground asleep.

It is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The figure of the god POSEIDON is dimly seen before the walls.

POSEIDON.

Up from Aegean caverns, pool by pool
Of blue salt sea, where feet most beautiful
Of Nereïd maidens weave beneath the foam
Their long sea-dances, I, their lord, am come,
Poseidon of the Sea. 'Twas I whose power,
With great Apollo, builded tower by tower
These walls of Troy; and still my care doth stand
True to the ancient People of my hand;
Which now as smoke is perished, in the shock
Of Argive spears. Down from Parnassus' rock
The Greek Epeios came, of Phocian seed,
And wrought by Pallas' mysteries a Steed
Marvellous, big with arms; and through my wall
It passed, a death-fraught image magical.

EURIPIDES

The groves are empty and the sanctuaries
Run red with blood. Unburied Priam lies
By his own hearth, on God's high altar-stair,
And Phrygian gold goes forth and raiment rare
To the Argive ships; and weary soldiers roam
Waiting the wind that blows at last for home,
For wives and children, left long years away,
Beyond the seed's tenth fullness and decay,
To work this land's undoing.

And for me,
Since Argive Hera conquereth, and she
Who wrought with Hera to the Phrygians' woe,
Pallas, behold, I bow mine head and go
Forth from great Ilion and mine altars old.
When a still city lieth in the hold
Of Desolation, all God's spirit there
Is sick and turns from worship.—Hearken where
The ancient River waileth with a voice
Of many women, portioned by the choice
Of war amid new lords, as the lots leap
For Thessaly, or Argos, or the steep
Of Theseus' Rock. And others yet there are,
High women, chosen from the waste of war
For the great kings, behind these portals hid;
And with them that Laconian Tyndarid,
Helen, like them a prisoner and a prize.

And this unhappy one—would any eyes
Gaze now on Hecuba? Here at the Gates
She lies 'mid many tears for many fates
Of wrong. One child beside Achilles' grave
In secret slain, Polyxena the brave,
Lies bleeding. Priam and his sons are gone;
And, lo, Cassandra, she the Chosen One,

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Whom Lord Apollo spared to walk her way
A swift and virgin spirit, on this day
Lust hath her, and she goeth garlanded
A bride of wrath to Agamemnon's bed.

*[He turns to go; and another divine Presence
becomes visible in the dusk. It is the
goddess PALLAS ATHENA.]*

O happy long ago, farewell, farewell,
Ye shining towers and mine old citadel;
Broken by Pallas, Child of God, or still
Thy roots had held thee true.

PALLAS.

Is it the will
Of God's high Brother, to whose hand is given
Great power of old, and worship of all Heaven,
To suffer speech from one whose enmities
This day are cast aside?

POSEIDON.

His will it is:
Kindred and long companionship withal,
Most high Athena, are things magical.

PALLAS.

Blest be thy gentle mood!—Methinks I see
A road of comfort here, for thee and me.

POSEIDON.

Thou hast some counsel of the Gods, or word
Spoken of Zeus? Or is it tidings heard
From some far Spirit?

EURIPIDES

PALLAS.

For this Ilion's sake,
Whereon we tread, I seek thee, and would make
My hand as thine.

POSEIDON.

Hath that old hate and deep
Failed, where she lieth in her ashen sleep?
Thou pitiest her?

PALLAS.

Speak first; wilt thou be one
In heart with me and hand till all be done?

POSEIDON.

Yea; but lay bare thy heart. For this land's sake
Thou comest, not for Hellas?

PALLAS.

I would make
Mine ancient enemies laugh for joy, and bring
On these Greek ships a bitter homecoming.

POSEIDON.

Swift is thy spirit's path, and strange withal,
And hot thy love and hate, where'er they fall.

PALLAS.

A deadly wrong they did me, yea within
Mine holy place: thou knowest?

THE TROJAN WOMEN

POSEIDON.

I know the sin
Of Ajax, when he cast Cassandra down . . .

PALLAS.

And no man rose and smote him; not a frown
Nor word from all the Greeks!

POSEIDON.

And 'twas thine hand
That gave them Troy!

PALLAS.

Therefore with thee I stand
To smite them.

POSEIDON.

All thou cravest, even now
Is ready in mine heart. What seekest thou?

PALLAS.

An homecoming that striveth ever more
And cometh to no home.

POSEIDON.

Here on the shore
Wouldst hold them or amid mine own salt foam?

PALLAS.

When the last ship hath bared her sail for home!
Zeus shall send rain, long rain and flaw of driven
Hail, and a whirling darkness blown from heaven;

EURIPIDES

To me his levin-light he promiseth
O'er ships and men, for scourging and hot death:
Do thou make wild the roads of the sea, and steep
With war of waves and yawning of the deep,
Till dead men choke Euboea's curling bay.
So Greece shall dread even in an after day
My house, nor scorn the Watchers of strange lands!

POSEIDON.

I give thy boon unbartered. These mine hands
Shall stir the waste Aegean; reefs that cross
The Delian pathways, jag-torn Myconos,
Scyros and Lemnos, yea, and storm-driven
Caphêreus with the bones of drownèd men
Shall glut him.—Go thy ways, and bid the Sire
Yield to thine hand the arrows of his fire.
Then wait thine hour, when the last ship shall wind
Her cable coil for home! [Exit PALLAS.]

How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!
[Exit POSEIDON.]

The day slowly dawns: HECUBA wakes.

HECUBA.

Up from the earth, O weary head!
This is not Troy, about, above—
Not Troy, nor we the lords thereof.
Thou breaking neck, be strengthenèd!

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Endure and chafe not. The winds rave
And falter. Down the world's wide road,
Float, float where streams the breath of God;
Nor turn thy prow to breast the wave.

Ah woe! . . . For what woe lacketh here?
My children lost, my land, my lord.
O thou great wealth of glory, stored
Of old in Ilion, year by year

We watched . . . and wert thou nothingness?
What is there that I fear to say?
And yet, what help? . . . Ah, well-a-day,
This ache of lying, comfortless

And haunted! Ah, my side, my brow
And temples! All with changeful pain
My body rocketh, and would fain
Move to the tune of tears that flow:
For tears are music too, and keep
A song unheard in hearts that weep.

*[She rises and gazes towards the Greek ships
far off on the shore.]*

O ships, O crowding faces
Of ships, O hurrying beat
Of oars as of crawling feet,
How found ye our holy places?
Threading the narrows through,
Out from the gulfs of the Greek,
Out to the clear dark blue,
With hate ye came and with joy,
And the noise of your music flew,
Clarion and pipe did shriek,

EURIPIDES

As the coilèd cords ye threw,
Held in the heart of Troy!

What sought ye then that ye came?

A woman, a thing abhorred:

A King's wife that her lord

Hateth: and Castor's shame

Is hot for her sake, and the reeds
Of old Eurôtas stir

With the noise of the name of her.

She slew mine ancient King,

The Sower of fifty Seeds,

And cast forth mine and me,

As shipwrecked men, that cling

To a reef in an empty sea.

Who am I that I sit

Here at a Greek king's door,

Yea, in the dust of it?

A slave that men drive before,

A woman that hath no home,

Weeping alone for her dead;

A low and bruised head,

And the glory struck therefrom.

*[She starts up from her solitary brooding,
and calls to the other Trojan Women
in the huts.]*

O Mothers of the Brazen Spear,

And maidens, maidens, brides of shame,

Troy is a smoke, a dying flame;

Together we will weep for her:

I call ye as a wide-wing'd bird

Calleth the children of her fold,

THE TROJAN WOMEN

To cry, ah, not the cry men heard
In Ilion, not the songs of old,
That echoed when my hand was true
On Priam's sceptre, and my feet
Touched on the stone one signal beat,
And out the Dardan music rolled;
And Troy's great Gods gave ear thereto.
*[The door of one of the huts on the right
opens, and the Women steal out sever-
ally, startled and afraid.]*

FIRST WOMAN.

[Strophe I.]

How say'st thou? Whither moves thy cry,
Thy bitter cry? Behind our door
We heard thy heavy heart outpour
Its sorrow: and there shivered by
Fear and a quick sob shaken
From prisoned hearts that shall be free no more!

HECUBA.

Child, 'tis the ships that stir upon the shore . . .

SECOND WOMAN.

The ships, the ships awaken!

THIRD WOMAN.

Dear God, what would they? Overseas
Bear me afar to strange cities?

HECUBA.

Nay, child, I know not. Dreams are these,
Fears of the hope-forsaken.

FIRST WOMAN.

Awake, O daughters of affliction, wake
And learn your lots! Even now the Argives break
Their camp for sailing!

EURIPIDES

HECUBA.

Ah, not Cassandra! Wake not her
Whom God hath maddened, lest the foe
Mock at her dreaming. Leave me clear
From that one edge of woe.

O Troy, my Troy, thou diest here
Most lonely; and most lonely we
The living wander forth from thee,
And the dead leave thee wailing!

*[One of the huts on the left is now open, and
the rest of the CHORUS come out sever-
ally. Their number eventually amounts
to fifteen.]*

FOURTH WOMAN.

[Antistrophe I.]

Out of the tent of the Greek king
I steal, my Queen, with trembling breath:
What means thy call? Not death; not death!
They would not slay so low a thing!

FIFTH WOMAN.

O, 'tis the ship-folk crying
To deck the galleys: and we part, we part!

HECUBA.

Nay, daughter: take the morning to thine heart.

FIFTH WOMAN.

My heart with dread is dying!

SIXTH WOMAN.

An herald from the Greek hath come!

FIFTH WOMAN.

How have they cast me, and to whom
A bondmaid?

HECUBA.

Peace, child: wait thy doom.
Our lots are near the trying.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

FOURTH WOMAN.

Argos, belike, or Phthia shall it be,
Or some lone island of the tossing sea,
Far, far from Troy?

HECUBA.

And I the agèd, where go I,
A winter-frozen bee, a slave
Death-shapen, as the stones that lie
Hewn on a dead man's grave:
The children of mine enemy
To foster, or keep watch before
The threshold of a master's door,
I that was Queen in Troy!

A WOMAN TO ANOTHER.

[*Strophe 2.*

And thou, what tears can tell thy doom?

THE OTHER.

The shuttle still shall flit and change
Beneath my fingers, but the loom,
Sister, be strange.

ANOTHER (*wildly*).

Look, my dead child! My child, my love,
The last look. . . .

ANOTHER.

Oh, there cometh worse.

A Greek's bed in the dark. . . .

ANOTHER.

God curse

That night and all the powers thereof!

EURIPIDES

ANOTHER.

Or pitchers to and fro to bear
To some Pirênê on the hill,
Where the proud water craveth still
Its broken-hearted minister.

ANOTHER.

God guide me yet to Theseus' land,
The gentle land, the famed afar . . .

ANOTHER.

But not the hungry foam—Ah, never!—
Of fierce Eurotas, Helen's river,
To bow to Menelaus' hand,
That wasted Troy with war!

A WOMAN.

[*Antistrophe* 2.]

They told us of a land high-born,
Where glimmers round Olympus' roots
A lordly river, red with corn
And burdened fruits.

ANOTHER.

Aye, that were next in my desire
To Athens, where good spirits dwell . . .

ANOTHER.

Or Aetna's breast, the deeps of fire
That front the Tyrian's Citadel:
First mother, she, of Sicily
And mighty mountains: fame hath told
Their crowns of goodness manifold. . . .

ANOTHER.

And, close beyond the narrowing sea,
A sister land, where float enchanted
Ionian summits, wave on wave,

THE TROJAN WOMEN

And Crathis of the burning tresses
Makes red the happy vale, and blesses
With gold of fountains spirit-haunted
Homes of true men and brave!

LEADER.

But lo, who cometh: and his lips
Grave with the weight of dooms unknown:
A Herald from the Grecian ships.
Swift comes he, hot-foot to be done
And finished. Ah, what bringeth he
Of news or judgment? Slaves are we,
Spoils that the Greek hath won!
[TALTHYBIUS, *followed by some Soldiers,*
enters from the left.

TALTHYBIUS.

Thou know'st me, Hecuba. Often have I crossed
Thy plain with tidings from the Hellene host.
'Tis I, Talthybius. . . . Nay, of ancient use
Thou know'st me. And I come to bear thee news.

HECUBA.

Ah me, 'tis here, 'tis here,
Women of Troy, our long embosomed fear!

TALTHYBIUS.

The lots are cast, if that it was ye feared.

HECUBA.

What lord, what land. . . . Ah me,
Phthia or Thebes, or sea-worn Thessaly?

TALTHYBIUS.

Each hath her own. Ye go not in one herd.

EURIPIDES

HECUBA.

Say then what lot hath any? What of joy
Falls, or can fall, on any child of Troy?

TALTHYBIUS.

I know: but make thy questions severally.

HECUBA.

My stricken one must be
Still first. Say how Cassandra's portion lies.

TALTHYBIUS.

Chosen from all for Agamemnon's prize!

HECUBA.

How, for his Spartan bride
A tirewoman? For Helen's sister's pride?

TALTHYBIUS.

Nay, nay: a bride herself, for the King's bed.

HECUBA.

The sainted of Apollo? And her own
Prize that God promised
Out of the golden clouds, her virgin crown? . . .

TALTHYBIUS.

He loved her for that same strange holiness.

HECUBA.

Daughter, away, away,
Cast all away,
The haunted Keys, the lonely stole's array
That kept thy body like a sacred place!

THE TROJAN WOMEN

TALTHYBIUS.

Is't not rare fortune that the King hath smiled
On such a maid?

HECUBA.

What of that other child
Ye reft from me but now?

TALTHYBIUS (*speaking with some constraint*).
Polyxena? Or what child meanest thou?

HECUBA.

The same. What man now hath her, or what doom?

TALTHYBIUS.

She rests apart, to watch Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA.

To watch a tomb? My daughter? What is this? . . .
Speak, Friend? What fashion of the laws of Greece?

TALTHYBIUS.

Count thy maid happy! She hath naught of ill
To fear . . .

HECUBA.

What meanest thou? She liveth still?

TALTHYBIUS.

I mean, she hath one toil that holds her free
From all toil else.

HECUBA.

What of Andromache,
Wife of mine iron-hearted Hector, where
Journeyeth she?

EURIPIDES

TALTHYBIUS.

Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, hath taken her.

HECUBA.

And I, whose slave am I,
The shaken head, the arm that creepeth by,
Staff-crutchèd, like to fall?

TALTHYBIUS.

Odysseus, Ithaca's king, hath thee for thrall.

HECUBA.

Beat, beat the crownless head:
Rend the cheek till the tears run red!
A lying man and a pitiless
Shall be lord of me, a heart full-flown
 With scorn of righteousness:
O heart of a beast where law is none,
Where all things change so that lust be fed,
The oath and the deed, the right and the wrong,
Even the hate of the forkèd tongue:
Even the hate turns and is cold,
False as the love that was false of old!

O Women of Troy, weep for me!
Yea, I am gone: I am gone my ways.
Mine is the crown of misery,
The bitterest day of all our days.

LEADER.

Thy fate thou knowest, Queen: but I know not
What lord of South or North has won my lot.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

TALTHYBIUS.

Go, seek Cassandra, men! Make your best speed,
That I may leave her with the King, and lead
These others to their divers lords. . . . Ha, there!
What means that sudden light? Is it the flare
Of torches?

[Light is seen shining through the crevices of the second hut on the right. He moves towards it.]

Would they fire their prison rooms,
Or how, these women?—Yes, 'fore God, the dooms
Are known, and now they burn themselves and die
Rather than sail with us! How savagely
In days like these a free neck chafes beneath
Its burden! . . . Open! Open quick! Such death
Were bliss to them, it may be: but 'twill bring
Much wrath, and leave me shamed before the King!

HECUBA.

There is no fire, no peril: 'tis my child,
Cassandra, by the breath of God made wild.

[The door opens from within and CASSANDRA enters, white-robed and wreathed like a Priestess, a great torch in her hand. She is singing softly to herself and does not see the Herald or the scene before her.]

CASSANDRA.

Lift, lift it high:

Give it to mine hand!

Lo, I bear a flame

Unto God! I praise his name.

I light with a burning brand

This sanctuary.

[Strophe.]

EURIPIDES

Blessèd is he that shall wed,
And blessèd, blessèd am I
In Argos: a bride to lie
With a king in a king's bed.

Hail, O Hymen red,
O Torch that makest one!
Weepest thou, Mother mine own?
Surely thy cheek is pale
With tears, tears that wail
For a land and a father dead.
But I go garlanded:
I am the Bride of Desire:
Therefore my torch is borne—
Lo, the lifting of morn,
Lo, the leaping of fire!—

For thee, O Hymen bright,
For thee, O Moon of the Deep,
So Law hath charged, for the light
Of a maid's last sleep.

Awake, O my feet, awake: [*Antistrophe.*]

Our father's hope is won!
Dance as the dancing skies
Over him, where he lies
Happy beneath the sun! . . .
Lo, the Ring that I make . . .

[*She makes a circle round her with a torch,
and visions appear to her.*]

Apollo! . . . Ah, is it thou?

O shrine in the laurels cold,
I bear thee still, as of old,
Mine incense! Be near to me now.

[*She waves the torch as though bearing incense.*]

THE TROJAN WOMEN

O Hymen, Hymen fleet:
Quick torch that makest one! . . .
How? Am I still alone?
Laugh as I laugh, and twine
In the dance, O Mother mine:
Dear feet, be near my feet!

Come, greet ye Hymen, greet
Hymen with songs of pride:
Sing to him loud and long,
Cry, cry, when the song
Faileth, for joy of the bride!

O Damsels girt in the gold
Of Ilion, cry, cry ye,
For him that is doomed of old
To be lord of me!

LEADER.

O hold the damsel, lest her trancèd feet
Lift her afar, Queen, toward the Hellene fleet!

HECUBA.

O Fire, Fire, where men make marriages
Surely thou hast thy lot; but what are these
Thou bringest flashing? Torches savage-wild
And far from mine old dreams.—Alas, my child,
How little dreamed I then of wars or red
Spears of the Greek to lay thy bridal bed!
Give me thy brand; it hath no holy blaze
Thus in thy frenzy flung. Nor all thy days
Nor all thy griefs have changed them yet, nor learned
Wisdom.—Ye women, bear the pine half burned

EURIPIDES

To the chamber back; and let your drownèd eyes
Answer the music of these bridal cries!

*[She takes the torch and gives it to one of the
women.]*

CASSANDRA.

O Mother, fill mine hair with happy flowers,
And speed me forth. Yea, if my spirit cowers,
Drive me with wrath! So liveth Loxias,
A bloodier bride than ever Helen was
Go I to Agamemnon, Lord most high
Of Hellas! . . . I shall kill him, mother; I
Shall kill him, and lay waste his house with fire
As he laid ours. My brethren and my sire
Shall win again . . .

(Checking herself) But part I must let be,
And speak not. Not the axe that craveth me,
And more than me; not the dark wanderings
Of mother-murder that my bridal brings,
And all the House of Atreus down, down, down . . .

Nay, I will show thee. Even now this town
Is happier than the Greeks. I know the power
Of God is on me: but this little hour,
Wilt thou but listen, I will hold him back!

One love, one woman's beauty, o'er the track
Of hunted Helen, made their myriads fall.
And this their King so wise, who ruleth all,
What wrought he? Cast out Love that Hate might
feed:

Gave to his brother his own child, his seed

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Of gladness, that a woman fled, and fain
To fly for ever, should be turned again!

So the days waned, and armies on the shore
Of Simois stood and strove and died. Wherefore?
No man had moved their landmarks; none had
shook

Their wallèd towns.—And they whom Ares took,
Had never seen their children: no wife came
With gentle arms to shroud the limbs of them
For burial, in a strange and angry earth
Laid dead. And there at home, the same long
dearth:

Women that lonely died, and aged men
Waiting for sons that ne'er should turn again,
Nor know their graves, nor pour drink-offerings,
To still the unslakèd dust. These be the things
The conquering Greek hath won!

But we—what pride,
What praise of men were sweeter?—fighting died
To save our people. And when war was red
Around us, friends upbore the gentle dead
Home, and dear women's hands about them wound
White shrouds, and here they sleep in the old
ground

Belovèd. And the rest long days fought on,
Dwelling with wives and children, not alone
And joyless, like these Greeks.

And Hector's woe,
What is it? He is gone, and all men know
His glory, and how true a heart he bore.
It is the gift the Greek hath brought! Of yore
Men saw him not, nor knew him. Yea, and even
Paris hath loved withal a child of heaven:

EURIPIDES

Else had his love but been as others are.

Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!
Therefore, O Mother, pity not thy slain,
Nor Troy, nor me, the bride. Thy direst foe
And mine by this my wooing is brought low.

TALTHYBIUS (*at last breaking through the spell
that has held him*).

I swear, had not Apollo made thee mad,
Not lightly hadst thou flung this shower of bad
Bodings, to speed my General o'er the seas!

'Fore God, the wisdoms and the greatnesses
Of seeming, are they hollow all, as things
Of naught? This son of Atreus, of all kings
Most mighty, hath so bowed him to the love
Of this mad maid, and chooseth her above
All women! By the Gods, rude though I be,
I would not touch her hand!

Look thou; I see
Thy lips are blind, and whatso words they speak,
Praises of Troy or shamings of the Greek,
I cast to the four winds! Walk at my side
In peace! . . . And heaven content him of his bride!

[*He moves as though to go, but turns to
HECUBA, and speaks more gently.*

And thou shalt follow to Odysseus' host
When the word comes. 'Tis a wise queen thou
go'st
To serve, and gentle: so the Ithacans say.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

CASSANDRA (*seeing for the first time the Herald
and all the scene*).

How fierce a slave ! . . . O Heralds, Heralds !

Yea,

Voices of Death ; and mists are over them
Of dead men's anguish, like a diadem,
These weak abhorred things that serve the hate
Of kings and peoples ! . . .

To Odysseus' gate
My mother goeth, say'st thou ? Is God's word
As naught, to me in silence ministered,
That in this place she dies ? . . . (*To herself*) No
more ; no more !

Why should I speak the shame of them, before
They come ? . . . Little he knows, that hard-beset
Spirit, what deeps of woe await him yet ;
Till all these tears of ours and harrowings
Of Troy, by his, shall be as golden things.
Ten years behind ten years athwart his way
Waiting : and home, lost and unfriended . . .

Nay :

Why should Odysseus' labours vex my breath ?
On ; hasten ; guide me to the house of Death,
To lie beside my bridegroom ! . . .

Thou Greek King,
Who deem'st thy fortune now so high a thing,
Thou dust of the earth, a lowlier bed I see,
In darkness, not in light, awaiting thee :
And with thee, with thee . . . there, where yawneth
plain

A rift of the hills, raging with winter rain,

EURIPIDES

Dead . . . and out-cast . . . and naked . . . It is I
Beside my bridegroom: and the wild beasts cry,
And ravin on God's chosen!

[She clasps her hands to her brow and feels the wreaths.]

O, ye wreaths!

Ye garlands of my God, whose love yet breathes
About me; shapes of joyance mystical;
Begone! I have forgot the festival,
Forgot the joy. Begone! I tear ye, so,
From off me! . . . Out on the swift winds they go.
With flesh still clean I give them back to thee,
Still white, O God, O light that ledest me!

[Turning upon the Hera'd.]

Where lies the galley? Whither shall I tread?
See that your watch be set, your sail be spread.
The wind comes quick! . . . Three Powers—mark me,
thou!—

There be of Hell, and one walks with thee now!

Mother, farewell, and weep not! O my sweet
City, my earth-clad brethren, and thou great
Sire that begat us; but a little now,
And I am with you: yea, with shining brow
I come, ye Dead, and shining from the fall
Of Atreus' House, the House that wrecked us all!

[She goes out, followed by TALTHYBIUS and the Soldiers; HECUBA, after waiting for an instant motionless, falls to the ground.]

LEADER OF CHORUS.

The Queen, ye Watchers! See, she falls, she falls,
Rigid without a word! O sorry thralls,

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Too late! And will ye leave her downstricken,
A woman, and so old? Raise her again!

*[Some women go to HECUBA, but she refuses
their aid and speaks without rising.]*

HECUBA.

Let lie . . . the love we seek not is no love . . .
This ruined body! Is the fall thereof
Too deep for all that now is over me
Of anguish, and hath been, and yet shall be?
Ye Gods . . . Alas! Why call on things so weak
For aid? Yet there is something that doth seek,
Crying, for God, when one of us hath woe.
O, I will think of things gone long ago
And weave them to a song, like one more tear
In the heart of misery. . . . All kings we were;
And I must wed a king. And sons I brought
My lord King, many sons . . . nay, that were naught;
But high strong princes, of all Troy the best.
Hellas nor Troäs nor the garnered East
Held such a mother! And all these things beneath
The Argive spear I saw cast down in death,
And shore these tresses at the dead men's feet.

Yea, and the gardener of my garden great,
It was not any noise of him nor tale
I wept for; these eyes saw him, when the pale
Was broke, and there at the altar Priam fell
Murdered, and round him all his citadel
Sacked. And my daughters, virgins of the fold,
Meet to be brides of mighty kings, behold,
'Twas for the Greek I bred them! All are gone;
And no hope left, that I shall look upon
Their faces any more, nor they on mine.

EURIPIDES

And now my feet tread on the utmost line:
An old, old slave-woman, I pass below
Mine enemies' gates; and whatso task they know
For this age basest, shall be mine; the door,
Bowing, to shut and open. . . . I that bore
Hector! . . . and meal to grind, and this racked head
Bend to the stones after a royal bed;
Torn rags about me, aye, and under them
Torn flesh; 'twill make a woman sick for shame!
Woe's me; and all that one man's arms might hold
One woman, what long seas have o'er me rolled
And roll for ever! . . . O my child, whose white
Soul laughed amid the laughter of God's light,
Cassandra, what hands and how strange a day
Have loosed thy zone! And thou, Polyxena,
Where art thou? And my sons? Not any seed
Of man nor woman now shall help my need.

Why raise me any more? What hope have I
To hold me? Take this slave that once trod high
In Ilion; cast her on her bed of clay
Rock-pillowed, to lie down, and pass away
Wasted with tears. And whatso man they call
Happy, believe not ere the last day fall!

CHORUS.

[*Strophe.*

O Muse, be near me now, and make
A strange song for Ilion's sake,
Till a tone of tears be about mine ears
And out of my lips a music break
For Troy, Troy, and the end of the years:
When the wheels of the Greek above me pressed,
And the mighty horse-hoofs beat my breast;
And all around were the Argive spears

THE TROJAN WOMEN

A towering Steed of golden rein—

O gold without, dark steel within!—

Ramped in our gates; and all the plain

Lay silent where the Greeks had been.

And a cry broke from all the folk

Gathered above on Ilion's rock:

“Up, up, O fear is over now!

To Pallas, who hath saved us living,

To Pallas bear this victory-vow!”

Then rose the old man from his room,

The merry damsel left her loom,

And each bound death about his brow

With minstrelsy and high thanksgiving!

[*Antistrophe.*

O, swift were all in Troy that day,

And girt them to the portal-way,

Marvelling at that mountain Thing

Smooth-carven, where the Argives lay,

And wrath, and Ilion's vanquishing:

Meet gift for her that spareth not,

Heaven's yokeless Rider. Up they brought

Through the steep gates her offering:

Like some dark ship that climbs the shore

On straining cables, up, where stood

Her marble throne, her hallowed floor,

Who lusted for her people's blood.

A very weariness of joy

Fell with the evening over Troy:

And lutes of Afric mingled there

With Phrygian songs: and many a maiden,

With white feet glancing light as air,

EURIPIDES

Made happy music through the gloom:
And fires on many an inward room
All night broad-flashing, flung their glare
On laughing eyes and slumber-laden.

A MAIDEN.

I was among the dancers there
To Artemis, and glorying sang
Her of the Hills, the Maid most fair,
Daughter of Zeus: and, lo, there rang
A shout out of the dark, and fell
Deathlike from street to street, and made
A silence in the citadel:
And a child cried, as if afraid,
And hid him in his mother's veil.
Then stalked the Slayer from his den,
The hand of Pallas served her well!
O blood, blood of Troy was deep
About the streets and altars then:
And in the wedded rooms of sleep,
Lo, the desolate dark alone,
And headless things, men stumbled on.

And forth, lo, the women go,
The crown of War, the crown of Woe,
To bear the children of the foe
And weep, weep, for Ilion!

*[As the song ceases a chariot is seen approaching
from the town, laden with spoils. On it
sits a mourning Woman with a child in
her arms.]*

THE TROJAN WOMEN

LEADER.

Lo, yonder on the heapèd crest
Of a Greek wain, Andromachê,
As one that o'er an unknown sea
Tosseth; and on her wave-borne breast
Her loved one clingeth, Hector's child,
Astyanax . . . O most forlorn
Of women, whither go'st thou, borne
'Mid Hector's bronzen arms, and piled
Spoils of the dead, and pageantry
Of them that hunted Ilion down?
Aye, richly thy new lord shall crown
The mountain shrines of Thessaly!

ANDROMACHE.

[*Strophe 1.*

Forth to the Greek I go,
Driven as a beast is driven.

HEC. Woe, woe!

AND. Nay, mine is woe:

Woe to none other given,
And the song and the crown therefor!

HEC. O Zeus!

AND. He hates thee sore!

HEC. Children!

AND. No more, no more
To aid thee: their strife is striven!

HECUBA.

[*Antistrophe 1.*

Troy, Troy is gone!

AND. Yea, and her treasure parted.

HEC. Gone, gone, mine own
Children, the noble-hearted!

EURIPIDES

AND. Sing sorrow. . . .

HEC. For me, for me!

AND. Sing for the Great City,
That falleth, falleth to be
A shadow, a fire departed.

ANDROMACHE.

[*Strophe 2.*

Come to me, O my lover!

HEC. The dark shroudeth him over,
My flesh, woman, not thine, not thine!

AND. Make of thine arms my cover!

HECUBA.

[*Antistrophe 2.*

O thou whose wound was deepest,
Thou that my children keepest,
Priam, Priam, O age-worn King,
Gather me where thou sleepest.

ANDROMACHE (*her hands upon her heart*).

[*Strophe 3.*

O here is the deep of desire,

HEC. (How? And is this not woe?)

AND. For a city burned with fire;

HEC. (It beateth, blow on blow.)

AND. God's wrath for Paris, thy son, that he died not
long ago:

Who sold for his evil love
Troy and the towers thereof:
Therefore the dead men lie
Naked, beneath the eye

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Of Pallas, and vultures croak
And flap for joy:
So Love hath laid his yoke
On the neck of Troy!

HECUBA.

[*Antistrophe* 3.]

O mine own land, my home,

AND. (I weep for thee, left forlorn,)

HEC. See'st thou what end is come?

AND. (And the house where my babes were born.)

HEC. A desolate Mother we leave, O children, a City
of scorn:

Even as the sound of a song
Left by the way, but long
Remembered, a tune of tears
Falling where no man hears,
In the old house, as rain,
For things loved of yore:
But the dead hath lost his pain
And weeps no more.

LEADER.

How sweet are tears to them in bitter stress,
And sorrow, and all the songs of heaviness.

ANDROMACHE.

Mother of him of old, whose mighty spear
Smote Greeks like chaff, see'st thou what things are
here?

HECUBA.

I see God's hand, that buildeth a great crown
For littleness, and hath cast the mighty down.

EURIPIDES

ANDROMACHE.

I and my babe are driven among the droves
Of plundered cattle. O, when fortune moves
So swift, the high heart like a slave beats low.

HECUBA.

'Tis fearful to be helpless. Men but now
Have taken Cassandra, and I strove in vain.

ANDROMACHE.

Ah, woe is me; hath Ajax come again?
But other evil yet is at thy gate.

HECUBA.

Nay, Daughter, beyond number, beyond weight
My evils are! Doom raceth against doom.

ANDROMACHE.

Polyxena across Achilles' tomb
Lies slain, a gift flung to the dreamless dead.

HECUBA.

My sorrow! . . . 'Tis but what Talthybius said:
So plain a riddle, and I read it not.

ANDROMACHE.

I saw her lie, and stayed this chariot;
And raiment wrapt on her dead limbs, and beat
My breast for her.

HECUBA (*to herself*).

O the foul sin of it!
The wickedness! My child. My child! Again
I cry to thee. How cruelly art thou slain!

THE TROJAN WOMEN

ANDROMACHE.

She hath died her death, and howso dark it be,
Her death is sweeter than my misery.

HECUBA.

Death cannot be what Life is, Child; the cup
Of Death is empty, and Life hath always hope.

ANDROMACHE.

O Mother, having ears, hear thou this word
Fear-conquering, till thy heart as mine be stirred
With joy. To die is only not to be;
And better to be dead than grievously
Living. They have no pain, they ponder not
Their own wrong. But the living that is brought
From joy to heaviness, his soul doth roam,
As in a desert, lost, from its old home.
Thy daughter lieth now as one unborn,
Dead, and naught knowing of the lust and scorn
That slew her. And I . . . long since I drew my
bow

Straight at the heart of good fame; and I know
My shaft hit; and for that am I the more
Fallen from peace. All that men praise us for,
I loved for Hector's sake, and sought to win.
I knew that alway, be there hurt therein
Or utter innocence, to roam abroad
Hath ill report for women; so I trod
Down the desire thereof, and walked my way
In mine own garden. And light words and gay

EURIPIDES

Parley of women never passed my door.

The thoughts of mine own heart . . . I craved no
more . . .

Spoke with me, and I was happy. Constantly
I brought fair silence and a tranquil eye
For Hector's greeting, and watched well the way
Of living, where to guide and where obey.

And, lo! some rumour of this peace, being gone
Forth to the Greek, hath cursed me. Achilles' son,
So soon as I was taken, for his thrall
Chose me. I shall do service in the hall
Of them that slew . . . How? Shall I thrust aside
Hector's belovèd face, and open wide
My heart to this new lord? Oh, I should stand
A traitor to the dead! And if my hand
And flesh shrink from him . . . lo, wrath and despite
O'er all the house, and I a slave!

One night,

One night . . . aye, men have said it . . . maketh tame
A woman in a man's arms. . . . O shame, shame!
What woman's lips can so forswear her dead,
And give strange kisses in another's bed?
Why, not a dumb beast, not a colt will run
In the yoke untroubled, when her mate is gone—
A thing not in God's image, dull, unmoved
Of reason. O my Hector! best beloved,
That, being mine, wast all in all to me,
My prince, my wise one, O my majesty
Of valiance! No man's touch had ever come
Near me, when thou from out my father's home
Didst lead me and make me thine. . . . And thou art
dead,

And I war-flung to slavery and the bread

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Of shame in Hellas, over bitter seas!

What knoweth she of evils like to these,
That dead Polyxena, thou weapest for?
There liveth not in my life any more
The hope that others have. Nor will I tell
The lie to mine own heart, that aught is well
Or shall be well. . . . Yet, O, to dream were sweet!

LEADER.

Thy feet have trod the pathway of my feet,
And thy clear sorrow teacheth me mine own.

HECUBA.

Lo, yonder ships: I ne'er set foot on one,
But tales and pictures tell, when over them
Breaketh a storm not all too strong to stem,
Each man strives hard, the tiller gripped, the mast
Manned, the hull baled, to face it: till at last
Too strong breaks the o'erwhelming sea: lo, then
They cease, and yield them up as broken men
To fate and the wild waters. Even so
I in my many sorrows bear me low,
Nor curse, nor strive that other things may be.
The great wave rolled from God hath conquered me.

But, O, let Hector and the fates that fell
On Hector, sleep. Weep for him ne'er so well,
Thy weeping shall not wake him. Honour thou
The new lord that is set above thee now,
And make of thine own gentle piety
A prize to lure his heart. So shalt thou be
A strength to them that love us, and—God knows,
It may be—rear this babe among his foes,

EURIPIDES

My Hector's child, to manhood and great aid
For Ilion. So her stones may yet be laid
One on another, if God will, and wrought
Again to a city! Ah, how thought to thought
Still beckons! . . . But what minion of the Greek
Is this that cometh, with new words to speak?

*[Enter TALTHYBIUS with a band of Soldiers.
He comes forward slowly and with evident disquiet.]*

TALTHYBIUS.

Spouse of the noblest heart that beat in Troy,
Andromache, hate me not! 'Tis not in joy
I tell thee. But the people and the Kings
Have with one voice . . .

ANDROMACHE.

What is it? Evil things
Are on thy lips!

TALTHYBIUS.

'Tis ordered, this child . . . Oh,
How can I tell her of it?

ANDROMACHE.

Doth he not go
With me, to the same master?

TALTHYBIUS.

There is none
In Greece, shall e'er be master of thy son.

ANDROMACHE.

How? Will they leave him here to build again
The wreck? . . .

THE TROJAN WOMEN

TALTHYBIUS.

I know not how to tell thee plain!

ANDROMACHE.

Thou hast a gentle heart . . . if it be ill,
And not good, news thou hidest!

TALTHYBIUS.

'Tis their will
Thy son shall die. . . . The whole vile thing is said
Now!

ANDROMACHE.

Oh, I could have borne mine enemy's bed!

TALTHYBIUS.

And speaking in the council of the host
Odysseus hath prevailed—

ANDROMACHE.

O lost! lost! lost! . . .
Forgive me! It is not easy . . .

TALTHYBIUS.

. . . That the son
Of one so perilous be not fostered on
To manhood—

ANDROMACHE.

God; may his own counsel fall
On his own sons!

EURIPIDES

TALTHYBIUS.

. . . But from this crested wall
Of Troy be dashed, and die. . . . Nay, let the thing
Be done. Thou shalt be wiser so. Nor cling
So fiercely to him. Suffer as a brave
Woman in bitter pain; nor think to have
Strength which thou hast not. Look about thee here!
Canst thou see help, or refuge anywhere?
Thy land is fallen and thy lord, and thou
A prisoner and alone, one woman; how
Canst battle against us? For thine own good
I would not have thee strive, nor make ill blood
And shame about thee. . . . Ah, nor move thy lips
In silence there, to cast upon the ships
Thy curse! One word of evil to the host,
This babe shall have no burial, but be tossed
Naked. . . . Ah, peace! And bear as best thou may,
War's fortune. So thou shalt not go thy way
Leaving this child unburied; nor the Greek
Be stern against thee, if thy heart be meek!

ANDROMACHE (*to the child*).

Go, die, my best-beloved, my cherished one,
In fierce men's hands, leaving me here alone.
Thy father was too valiant; that is why
They slay thee! Other children, like to die,
Might have been spared for that. But on thy head
His good is turned to evil.

O thou bed
And bridal; O the joining of the hand,
That led me long ago to Hector's land

THE TROJAN WOMEN

To bear, O not a lamb for Grecian swords
To slaughter, but a Prince o'er all the hordes
Enthroned of wide-flung Asia. . . . Weepest thou?
Nay, why, my little one? Thou canst not know.
And Father will not come; he will not come;
Not once, the great spear flashing, and the tomb
Riven to set thee free! Not one of all
His brethren, nor the might of Ilion's wall.

How shall it be? One horrible spring . . . deep,
deep
Down. And thy neck . . . Ah God, so cometh
sleep! . . .

And none to pity thee! . . . Thou little thing
That curlest in my arms, what sweet scents cling
All round thy neck! Belovèd; can it be
All nothing, that this bosom cradled thee
And fostered; all the weary nights, wherethrough
I watched upon thy sickness, till I grew
Wasted with watching? Kiss me. This one time;
Not ever again. Put up thine arms, and climb
About my neck: now, kiss me, lips to lips. . . .

O, ye have found an anguish that outstrips
All tortures of the East, ye gentle Greeks!
Why will ye slay this innocent, that seeks
No wrong? . . . O Helen, Helen, thou ill tree
That Tyndareus planted, who shall deem of thee
As child of Zeus? O, thou hast drawn thy breath
From many fathers, Madness, Hate, red Death,
And every rotting poison of the sky!
Zeus knows thee not, thou vampire, draining dry.
Greece and the world! God hate thee and destroy,
That with those beautiful eyes hast blasted Troy,
And made the far-famed plains a waste withal.

EURIPIDES

Quick! take him: drag him: cast him from the wall,
If cast ye will! Tear him, ye beasts, be swift!
God hath undone me, and I cannot lift
One hand, one hand, to save my child from death . . .
O, hide my head for shame: fling me beneath
Your galleys' benches! . . .

[*She swoons: then half-rising.*

Quick: I must begone
To the bridal. . . . I have lost my child, my own!
[*The Soldiers close round her.*

LEADER.

O Troy ill-starred; for one strange woman, one
Abhorred kiss, how are thine hosts undone!

TALTHYBIUS (*bending over ANDROMACHE and gradually taking the Child from her*).

Come, Child: let be that clasp of love
Outwearied! Walk thy ways with me,
Up to the crested tower, above
Thy father's wall . . . Where they decree
Thy soul shall perish.—Hold him: hold!—
Would God some other man might ply
These charges, one of duller mould,
And nearer to the iron than I!

HECUBA.

O Child, they rob us of our own,
Child of my Mighty One outworn:
Ours, ours thou art!—Can aught be done
Of deeds, can aught of pain be borne,

THE TROJAN WOMEN

To aid thee?—Lo, this beaten head,
This bleeding bosom! These I spread
As gifts to thee. I can thus much.

Woe, woe for Troy, and woe for thee!
What fall yet lacketh, ere we touch
The last dead deep of misery?

[The Child, who has started back from TAL-
THYBIUS, is taken up by one of the Sol-
diers and borne back towards the city,
while ANDROMACHE is set again on the
Chariot and driven off towards the ships.
TALTHYBIUS goes with the Child.

CHORUS.

[Strophe 1.]

In Salamis, filled with the foaming
Of billows and murmur of bees,
Old Telamon stayed from his roaming,
Long ago, on a throne of the seas;
Looking out on the hills olive-laden,
Enchanted, where first from the earth
The grey-gleaming fruit of the Maiden
Athena had birth;
A soft grey crown for a city
Belovèd, a City of Light:
Yet he rested not there, nor had pity,
But went forth in his might,
Where Heracles wandered, the lonely
Bow-bearer, and lent him his hands
For the wrecking of one land only,
Of Ilion, Ilion only,
Most hated of lands!

EURIPIDES

[*Antistrophe* 1.]

Of the bravest of Hellas he made him
A ship-folk, in wrath for the Steeds,
And sailed the wide waters, and stayed him
At last amid Simoïs' reeds;
And the oars beat slow in the river,
And the long ropes held in the strand,
And he felt for his bow and his quiver,
The wrath of his hand.
And the old king died; and the towers
That Phœbus had builded did fall,
And his wrath, as a flame that devours,
Ran red over all;
And the fields and the woodlands lay blasted,
Long ago. Yea, twice hath the Sire
Uplifted his hand and downcast it
On the wall of the Dardan, downcast it
As a sword and as fire.

[*Strophe* 2.]

In vain, all in vain,
O thou 'mid the wine-jars golden
That movest in delicate joy,
Ganymêdês, child of Troy,
The lips of the Highest drain
The cup in thine hand upholden:
And thy mother, thy mother that bore thee,
Is wasted with fire and torn;
And the voice of her shores is heard,
Wild, as the voice of a bird,
For lovers and children before thee
Crying, and mothers outworn.
And the pools of thy bathing are perished,
And the wind-strewn ways of thy feet:

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Yet thy face as aforetime is cherished
Of Zeus, and the breath of it sweet;
Yea, the beauty of Calm is upon it
In houses at rest and afar.
But thy land, He hath wrecked and o'erthrown it
In the wailing of war.

[*Antistrophe* 2.]

O Love, ancient Love,
Of old to the Dardan given;
Love of the Lords of the Sky;
How didst thou lift us high
In Ilion, yea, and above
All cities, as wed with heaven!
For Zeus—O leave it unspoken:
But alas for the love of the Morn;
Morn of the milk-white wing,
The gentle, the earth-loving,
That shineth on battlements broken
In Troy, and a people forlorn!
And, lo, in her bowers Tithônus,
Our brother, yet sleeps as of old:
O, she too hath loved us and known us,
And the Steeds of her star, flashing gold,
Stooped hither and bore him above us;
Then blessed we the Gods in our joy.
But all that made them to love us
Hath perished from Troy.

[*As the song ceases, the King MENELAUS enters, richly armed and followed by a body-guard of Soldiers. He is a prey to violent and conflicting emotions.*

EURIPIDES

MENELAUS.

How bright the face of heaven, and how sweet
The air this day, that layeth at my feet
The woman that I . . . Nay: 'twas not for her
I came. 'Twat for the man, the cozenor
And thief, that ate with me and stole away
My bride. But Paris lieth, this long day,
By God's grace, under the horse-hoofs of the Greek,
And round him all his land. And now I seek . . .
Curse her! I scarce can speak the name she bears,
That was my wife. Here with the prisoners
They keep her, in these huts, among the hordes
Of numbered slaves.—The host whose labouring swords
Won her, have given her up to me, to fill
My pleasure; perchance kill her, or not kill,
But lead her home.—Methinks I have foregone
The slaying of Helen here in Ilion . . .
Over the long seas I will bear her back,
And there, there, cast her out to whatso wrack
Of angry death they may devise, who know
Their dearest dead for her in Ilion.—Ho!
Ye soldiers! Up into the chambers where
She croucheth! Grip the long blood-reeking hair,
And drag her to mine eyes . . . [*Controlling himself.*
And when there come
Fair breezes, my long ships shall bear her home.

[*The Soldiers go to force open the door of the
second hut on the left.*]

HECUBA.

Thou deep Base of the World, and thou high Throne
Above the World, whoe'er thou art, unknown

THE TROJAN WOMEN

And hard of surmise, Chain of Things that be,
Or Reason of our Reason; God, to thee
I lift my praise, seeing the silent road
That bringeth iustice ere the end be trod
To all that breathes and dies.

MENELAUS (*turning*).

Ha! who is there
That prayeth heaven, and in so strange a prayer?

HECUBA.

I bless thee, Menelaus, I bless thee,
If thou wilt slay her! Only fear to see
Her visage, lest she snare thee and thou fall!
She snareth strong men's eyes; she snareth tall
Cities; and fire from out her eateth up
Houses. Such magic hath she, as a cup
Of death! . . . Do I not know her? Yea, and thou,
And these that lie around, do they not know?

*[The Soldiers return from the hut and stand
aside to let HELEN pass between them.
She comes through them, gentle and un-
fraid; there is no disorder in her raiment.]*

HELEN.

King Menelaus, thy first deed might make
A woman fear. Into my chamber brake
Thine armèd men, and lead me wrathfully.
Methinks, almost, I know thou hatest me.
Yet I would ask thee, what decree is gone
Forth for my life or death?

MENELAUS (*struggling with his emotion*).

There was not one

EURIPIDES

That scrupled for thee. All, all with one will
Gave thee to me, whom thou hast wronged, to kill!

HELEN.

And is it granted that I speak, or no,
In answer to them ere I die, to show
I die most wronged and innocent?

MENELAUS.

I seek
To kill thee, woman; not to hear thee speak!

HECUBA.

O hear her! She must never die unheard,
King Menelaus! And give me the word
To speak in answer! All the wrong she wrought
Away from thee, in Troy, thou knowest not.
The whole tale set together is a death
Too sure; she shall not 'scape thee!

MENELAUS.

'Tis but breath
And time. For thy sake, Hecuba, if she need
To speak, I grant the prayer. I have no heed
Nor mercy—let her know it well—for her!

HELEN.

It may be that, how false or true soe'er
Thou deem me, I shall win no word from thee.
So sore thou holdest me thine enemy.
Yet I will take what words I think thy heart
Holdeth of anger: and in even part
Set my wrong and thy wrong, and all that fell.

[*Pointing to* HECUBA.]

THE TROJAN WOMEN

She cometh first, who bare the seed and well
Of springing sorrow, when to life she brought
Paris: and that old King, who quenched not
Quick in the spark, ere yet he woke to slay,
The firebrand's image.—But enough: a day
Came, and this Paris judged beneath the trees
Three Crowns of Life, three diverse Goddesses.
The gift of Pallas was of War, to lead
His East in conquering battles, and make bleed
The hearths of Hellas. Hera held a Throne—
If majesties he craved—to reign alone
From Phrygia to the last realm of the West.
And Cypris, if he deemed her loveliest,
Beyond all heaven, made dreams about my face
And for her grace gave me. And, lo! her grace
Was judged the fairest, and she stood above
Those twain.—Thus was I loved, and thus my
love

Hath holpen Hellas. No fierce Eastern crown
Is o'er your lands, no spear hath cast them down.
O, it was well for Hellas! But for me
Most ill; caught up and sold across the sea
For this my beauty; yea, dishonoured
For that which else had been about my head
A crown of honour. . . . Ah, I see thy thought;
The first plain deed, 'tis that I answer not,
How in the dark out of thy house I fled . . .
There came the Seed of Fire, this woman's seed;
Came—O, a Goddess great walked with him then—
This Alexander, Breaker-down-of-Men,
This Paris, Strength-is-with-him; whom thou,
whom—

O false and light of heart—thou in thy room

EURIPIDES

Didst leave, and spreadest sail for Cretan seas,
Far, far from me! . . . And yet, how strange it is!
I ask not thee; I ask my own sad thought,
What was there in my heart, that I forgot
My home and land and all I loved, to fly
With a strange man? Surely it was not I,
But Cypris, there! Lay thou thy rod on her,
And be more high than Zeus and bitterer,
Who o'er all other spirits hath his throne,
But knows her chain must bind him. My wrong done
Hath its own pardon. . . .

One word yet thou hast,
Methinks, of righteous seeming. When at last
The earth for Paris oped and all was o'er,
And her strange magic bound my feet no more,
Why kept I still his house, why fled not I
To the Argive ships? . . . Ah, how I strove to fly!
The old Gate-Warden could have told thee all,
My husband, and the watchers from the wall;
It was not once they took me, with the rope
Tied, and this body swung in the air, to grope
Its way toward thee, from that dim battlement.

Ah, husband still, how shall thy hand be bent
To slay me? Nay, if Right be come at last,
What shalt thou bring but comfort for pains past,
And harbour for a woman storm-driven:
A woman borne away by violent men:
And this one birthright of my beauty, this
That might have been my glory, lo, it is
A stamp that God hath burned, of slavery!

Alas! and if thou cravest still to be
As one set above gods, inviolate,
'Tis but a fruitless longing holds thee yet.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

LEADER.

O Queen, think of thy children and thy land,
And break her spell! The sweet soft speech, the
hand
And heart so fell: it maketh me afraid.

HECUBA.

Meseems her goddesses first cry mine aid
Against these lying lips! . . . Not Hera, nay,
Nor virgin Pallas deem I such low clay,
To barter their own folk, Argos and brave
Athens, to be trod down, the Phrygian's slave,
All for vain glory and a shepherd's prize
On Ida! Wherefore should great Hera's eyes
So hunger to be fair? She doth not use
To seek for other loves, being wed with Zeus.
And maiden Pallas . . . did some strange god's face
Beguile her, that she craved for loveliness,
Who chose from God one virgin gift above
All gifts, and fleeth from the lips of love?

Ah, deck not out thine own heart's evil springs
By making spirits of heaven as brutish things
And cruel. The wise may hear thee, and guess all!

And Cypris must take ship—fantastical!
Sail with my son and enter at the gate
To seek thee! Had she willed it, she had sate
At peace in heaven, and wafted thee, and all
Amyclae with thee, under Ilion's wall.

My son was passing beautiful, beyond
His peers; and thine own heart, that saw and conned
His face, became a spirit enchanting thee.
For all wild things that in mortality

EURIPIDES

Have being, are Aphroditê; and the name
She bears in heaven is born and writ of them.

Thou sawest him in gold and orient vest
Shining, and lo, a fire about thy breast
Leapt! Thou hadst fed upon such little things,
Pacing thy ways in Argos. But now wings
Were come! Once free from Sparta, and there rolled
The Ilian glory, like broad streams of gold,
To steep thine arms and splash the towers! How
small,

How cold that day was Menelaus' hall!

Enough of that. It was by force my son
Took thee, thou sayst, and striving. . . . Yet not one
In Sparta knew! No cry, no sudden prayer
Rang from thy rooms that night. . . . Castor was there
To hear thee, and his brother: both true men,
Not yet among the stars! And after, when
Thou camest here to Troy, and in thy track
Argos and all its anguish and the rack
Of war—Ah God!—perchance men told thee 'Now
The Greek prevails in battle': then wouldst thou
Praise Menelaus, that my son might smart,
Striving with that old image in a heart
Uncertain still. Then Troy had victories:
And this Greek was as naught! Always thine eyes
Watched Fortune's eyes, to follow hot where she
Led first. Thou wouldst not follow Honesty.

Thy secret ropes, thy body swung to fall
Far, like a desperate prisoner, from the wall!
Who found thee so? When wast thou taken? Nay,
Hadst thou no surer rope, no sudden way
Of the sword, that any woman honest-souled
Had sought long since, loving her lord of old?

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Often and often did I charge thee; 'Go,
My daughter; go thy ways. My sons will know
New loves. I will give aid, and steal thee past
The Argive watch. O give us peace at last,
Us and our foes!' But out thy spirit cried
As at a bitter word. Thou hadst thy pride
In Alexander's house, and O, 'twas sweet
To hold proud Easterns bowing at thy feet.
They were great things to thee! . . . And comest thou
now

Forth, and hast decked thy bosom and thy brow,
And breathest with thy lord the same blue air,
Thou evil heart? Low, low, with ravaged hair,
Rent raiment, and flesh shuddering, and within—
O shame at last, not glory for thy sin;
So face him if thou canst! . . . Lo, I have done.
Be true, O King; let Hellas bear her crown
Of Justice. Slay this woman, and upraise
The law for evermore: she that betrays
Her husband's bed, let her be judged and die.

LEADER.

Be strong, O King; give judgment worthily
For thee and thy great house. Shake off thy long
Reproach; not weak, but iron against the wrong!

MENELAUS.

Thy thought doth walk with mine in one intent.
'Tis sure; her heart was willing, when she went
Forth to a stranger's bed. And all her fair
Tale of enchantment, 'tis a thing of air! . . .

[*Turning furiously upon HELEN.*

EURIPIDES

Out, woman! There be those that seek thee yet
With stones! Go, meet them. So shall thy long debt
Be paid at last. And ere this night is o'er
Thy dead face shall dishonour me no more!

HELEN (*kneeling before him and embracing him*).

Behold, mine arms are wreathed about thy knees;
Lay not upon my head the phantasies
Of Heaven. Remember all, and slay me not!

HECUBA.

Remember them she murdered, them that fought
Beside thee, and their children! Hear that prayer!

MENELAUS.

Peace, agèd woman, peace! 'Tis not for her;
She is as naught to me.

(*To the Soldiers*) . . . March on before,
Ye ministers, and tend her to the shore . . .
And have some chambered galley set for her,
Where she may sail the seas.

HECUBA.

If thou be there,
I charge thee, let not her set foot therein!

MENELAUS.

How? Shall the ship go heavier for her sin?

HECUBA.

A lover once, will alway love again.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

MENELAUS.

If that he loved be evil, he will fain
Hate it! . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be done.
Some other ship shall bear her, not mine own. . . .
Thou counsellest very well . . . And when we come
To Argos, then . . . O then some pitiless doom
Well-earned, black as her heart! One that shall bind
Once for all time the law on womankind
Of faithfulness! . . . 'Twill be no easy thing,
God knoweth. But the thought thereof shall fling
A chill on the dreams of women, though they be
Wilder of wing and loathèd more than she!

*[Exit, following HELEN, who is escorted by the
Soldiers.]*

CHORUS.

Some Women.

[Strophe 1.]

And hast thou turned from the Altar of frankin-
cense,

And given to the Greek thy temple of Ilion?

The flame of the cakes of corn, is it gone from
hence,

The myrrh on the air and the wreathèd towers
gone?

And Ida, dark Ida, where the wild ivy grows,

The glens that run as rivers from the summer-broken
snows,

And the Rock, is it forgotten, where the first sunbeam
glows,

The lit house most holy of the Dawn?

EURIPIDES

Others.

[*Antistrophe 1.*

The sacrifice is gone and the sound of joy,
The dancing under the stars and the night-long
prayer:

The Golden Images and the Moons of Troy,
The twelve Moons and the mighty names they
bear:

My heart, my heart crieth, O Lord Zeus on high,
Were they all to thee as nothing, thou thronèd in the
sky,
Thronèd in the fire-cloud, where a City, near to die,
Passeth in the wind and the flare?

A Woman.

[*Strophe 2.*

Dear one, O husband mine,
Thou in the dim dominions
Driftest with waterless lips,
Unburied; and me the ships
Shall bear o'er the bitter brine,
Storm-birds upon angry pinions,
Where the towers of the Giants shine
O'er Argos cloudily,
And the riders ride by the sea.

Others.

And children still in the Gate
Crowd and cry,
A multitude desolate,
Voices that float and wait
As the tears run dry:

THE TROJAN WOMEN

‘ Mother, alone on the shore
They drive me, far from thee:
Lo, the dip of the oar,
The black hull on the sea!
Is it the Isle Immortal,
Salamis, waits for me?
Is it the Rock that broods
Over the sundered floods
Of Corinth, the ancient portal
Of Pelops’ sovranty? ’

A Woman.

[*Antistrophe 2.*

Out in the waste of foam,
Where rideth dark Menelaus,
Come to us there, O white
And jagged, with wild sea-light
And crashing of oar-blades, come,
O thunder of God, and slay us:
While our tears are wet for home,
While out in the storm go we,
Slaves of our enemy!

Others.

And, God, may Helen be there,
With mirror of gold,
Decking her face so fair,
Girl-like; and hear, and stare,
And turn death-cold:
Never, ah, never more
The hearth of her home to see,
Nor sand of the Spartan shore,
Nor tombs where her fathers be,

EURIPIDES

Nor Athena's bronzen Dwelling,
Nor the towers of Pitanê;
For her face was a dark desire
Upon Greece, and shame like fire,
And her dead are welling, welling,
From red Simoïs to the sea!

[TALTHYBIUS, *followed by one or two Soldiers*
and bearing the child ASTYANAX dead, is
seen approaching.

LEADER.

Ah, change on change! Yet each one racks
This land with evil manifold;
Unhappy wives of Troy, behold,
They bear the dead Astyanax,
Our prince, whom bitter Greeks this hour
Have hurled to death from Ilion's tower.

TALTHYBIUS.

One galley, Hecuba, there lingereth yet,
Lapping the wave, to gather the last freight
Of Pyrrhus' spoils for Thessaly. The chief
Himself long since hath parted, much in grief
For Pêleus' sake, his grandsire, whom, men say,
Acastus, Pelias' son, in war array
Hath driven to exile. Loath enough before
Was he to linger, and now goes the more
In haste, bearing Andromache, his prize.
'Tis she hath charmed these tears into mine eyes,
Weeping her fatherland, as o'er the wave
She gazed, and speaking words to Hector's grave.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Howbeit, she prayed us that due rites be done
For burial of this babe, thine Hector's son,
That now from Ilion's tower is fallen and dead.
And, lo! this great bronze-fronted shield, the dread
Of many a Greek, that Hector held in fray,
O never in God's name—so did she pray—
Be this borne forth to hang in Pêleus' hall
Or that dark bridal chamber, that the wall
May hurt her eyes; but here, in Troy o'erthrown,
Instead of cedar wood and vaulted stone,
Be this her child's last house. . . . And in thine hands
She bade me lay him, to be swathed in bands
Of death and garments, such as rest to thee
In these thy fallen fortunes; seeing that she
Hath gone her ways, and, for her master's haste,
May no more fold the babe unto his rest.

Howbeit, so soon as he is garlanded
And robed, we will heap earth above his head
And lift our sails. . . . See all be swiftly done,
As thou art bidden. I have saved thee one
Labour. For as I passed Scamander's stream
Hard by, I let the waters run on him,
And cleansed his wounds.—See, I will go forth now
And break the hard earth for his grave: so thou
And I will haste together, to set free
Our oars at last to beat the homeward sea!

*[He goes out with his Soldiers, leaving the body
of the Child in HECUBA'S arms.]*

HECUBA.

Set the great orb of Hector's shield to lie
Here on the ground. 'Tis bitter that mine eye

EURIPIDES

Should see it. . . . O ye Argives, was your spear
Keen, and your hearts so low and cold, to fear
This babe? 'Twas a strange murder for brave
men!

For fear this babe some day might raise again
His fallen land! Had ye so little pride?
While Hector fought, and thousands at his side,
Ye smote us, and we perished; and now, now,
When all are dead and Ilion lieth low,
Ye dread this innocent! I deem it not
Wisdom, that rage of fear that hath no thought. . . .

Ah, what a death hath found thee, little one!
Hadst thou but fallen fighting, hadst thou known
Strong youth and love and all the majesty
Of godlike kings, then had we spoken of thee
As of one blessed . . . could in any wise
These days know blessedness. But now thine eyes
Have seen, thy lips have tasted, but thy soul
No knowledge had nor usage of the whole
Rich life that lapt thee round. . . . Poor little child!
Was it our ancient wall, the circuit piled
By loving Gods, so savagely hath rent
Thy curls, these little flowers innocent
That were thy mother's garden, where she laid
Her kisses; here, just where the bone-edge frayed
Grins white above—Ah heaven, I will not see!

Ye tender arms, the same dear mould have ye
As his; how from the shoulder loose ye drop
And weak! And dear proud lips, so full of hope
And closed for ever! What false words ye said
At daybreak, when he crept into my bed,
Called me kind names, and promised: 'Grandmother,
When thou art dead, I will cut close my hair

THE TROJAN WOMEN

And lead out all the captains to ride by
'Thy tomb.' Why didst thou cheat me so? 'Tis I,
Old, homeless, childless, that for thee must shed
Cold tears, so young, so miserably dead.

Dear God, the pattering welcomes of thy feet,
The nursing in my lap; and O, the sweet
Falling asleep together! All is gone.
How should a poet carve the funeral stone
To tell thy story true? 'There lieth here
A babe whom the Greeks feared, and in their fear
Slew him.' Aye, Greece will bless the tale it
tells!

Child, they have left thee beggared of all else
In Hector's house; but one thing shalt thou keep,
This war-shield bronzen-barred, wherein to sleep.
Alas, thou guardian true of Hector's fair
Left arm, how art thou masterless! And there
I see his handgrip printed on thy hold;
And deep stains of the precious sweat, that rolled
In battle from the brows and beard of him,
Drop after drop, are writ about thy rim.

Go, bring them—such poor garments hazardous
As these days leave. God hath not granted us
Wherewith to make much pride. But all I can,
I give thee, Child of Troy.—O vain is man,
Who glorieth in his joy and hath no fears:
While to and fro the chances of the years
Dance like an idiot in the wind! And none
By any strength hath his own fortune won.

[During these lines several Women are seen approaching with garlands and raiment in their hands.]

EURIPIDES

LEADER.

Lo these, who bear thee raiment harvested
From Ilion's slain, to fold upon the dead.

*[During the following scene HECUBA gradually
takes the garments and wraps them about
the Child.]*

HECUBA.

O not in pride for speeding of the car
Beyond thy peers, not for the shaft of war
True aimed, as Phrygians use; not any prize
Of joy for thee, nor splendour in men's eyes,
Thy father's mother lays these offerings
About thee, from the many fragrant things
That were all thine of old. But now no more.
One woman, loathed of God, hath broke the door
And robbed thy treasure-house, and thy warm breath
Made cold, and trod thy people down to death!

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Deep in the heart of me
I feel thine hand,
Mother: and is it he
Dead here, our prince to be,
And lord of the land?

HECUBA.

Glory of Phrygian raiment, which my thought
Kept for thy bridal day with some far-sought
Queen of the East, folds thee for evermore.
And thou, grey Mother, Mother-Shield that bore

THE TROJAN WOMEN

A thousand days of glory, thy last crown
Is here. . . . Dear Hector's shield! Thou shalt lie
down

Undying with the dead, and lordlier there
Than all the gold Odysseus' breast can bear,
The evil and the strong!

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Child of the Shield-bearer,
Alas, Hector's child!
Great Earth, the All-mother,
Taketh thee unto her
With wailing wild!

Others.

Mother of misery,
Give Death his song!

{HEC. Woe!) Aye and bitterly

(HEC. Woe!) We too weep for thee,

And the infinite wrong!

*[During these lines HECUBA, kneeling by the
body, has been performing a funeral rite,
symbolically staunching the dead Child's
wounds.]*

HECUBA.

I make thee whole;
I bind thy wounds, O little vanished soul.
This wound and this I heal with linen white:
O emptiness of aid! . . . Yet let the rite
Be spoken. This and . . . Nay, not I, but he,
Thy father far away shall comfort thee!

*[She bows her head to the ground and remains
motionless and unseeing.]*

EURIPIDES

CHORUS.

Beat, beat thine head:
Beat with the wailing chime
Of hands lifted in time:
Beat and bleed for the dead.
Woe is me for the dead!

HECUBA.

O Women! Ye, mine own . . .

[She rises bewildered, as though she had seen a vision.]

LEADER.

Hecuba, speak!
Thine are we all. Oh, ere thy bosom break . . .

HECUBA.

Lo, I have seen the open hand of God;
And in it nothing, nothing, save the rod
Of mine affliction, and the eternal hate,
Beyond all lands, chosen and lifted great
For Troy! Vain, vain were prayer and incense-swell
And bulls' blood on the altars! . . . All is well.
Had He not turned us in His hand, and thrust
Our high things low and shook our hills as dust,
We had not been this splendour, and our wrong
An everlasting music for the song
Of earth and heaven!

Go, women: lay our dead
In his low sepulchre. He hath his meed
Of robing. And, methinks, but little care
Toucheth the tomb, if they that moulder there

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Have rich encerement. 'Tis we, 'tis we,
That dream, we living and our vanity!

[The Women bear out the dead Child upon the shield, singing, when presently flames of fire and dim forms are seen among the ruins of the City.]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Woe for the mother that bare thee, child,
Thread so frail of a hope so high,
That Time hath broken: and all men smiled
About thy cradle, and, passing by,
Spoke of thy father's majesty.
Low, low, thou liest!

Others.

Ha! Who be these on the crested rock?
Fiery hands in the dusk, and a shock
Of torches flung! What lingereth still,
O wounded City, of unknown ill,
Ere yet thou diest?

TALTHYBIUS (*coming out through the ruined Wall*).

Ye Captains that have charge to wreck this keep
Of Priam's City, let your torches sleep
No more! Up, fling the fire into her heart!
Then have we done with Ilion, and may part
In joy to Hellas from this evil land.

And ye—so hath one word two faces—stand,

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Daughters of Troy, till on your ruined wall
The echo of my master's trumpet call
In signal breaks: then, forward to the sea,
Where the long ships lie waiting.

And for thee,
O ancient woman most unfortunate,
Follow: Odysseus' men be here, and wait
To guide thee. . . . 'Tis to him thou go'st for thrall.

HECUBA.

Ah, me! and is it come, the end of all,
The very crest and summit of my days?
I go forth from my land, and all its ways
Are filled with fire! Bear me, O aged feet,
A little nearer: I must gaze, and greet
My poor town ere she fall.

Farewell, farewell!

O thou whose breath was mighty on the swell
Of orient winds, my Troy! Even thy name
Shall soon be taken from thee. Lo, the flame
Hath thee, and we, thy children, pass away
To slavery . . . God! O God of mercy! . . . Nay:
Why call I on the Gods? They know, they know,
My prayers, and would not hear them long ago.

Quick, to the flames! O, in thine agony,
My Troy, mine own, take me to die with thee!

[*She springs toward the flames, but is seized and held by the Soldiers.*]

TALTHYBIUS.

Back! Thou art drunken with thy miseries,
 Poor woman!—Hold her fast, men, till it please

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Odysseus that she come. She was his lot
Chosen from all and portioned. Lose her not!

*[He goes to watch over the burning of the City.
The dusk deepens.]*

CHORUS.

Divers Women.

Woe, woe, woe!

Thou of the Ages, O wherefore fleëst thou,
Lord of the Phrygian, Father that made us?
'Tis we, thy children; shall no man aid us?
'Tis we, thy children! Seëst thou, seëst thou?

Others.

He seëth, only his heart is pitiless;
And the land dies: yea, she,
She of the Mighty Cities perisheth citiless!
Troy shall no more be!

Others.

Woe, woe, woe!
Ilion shineth afar!
Fire in the deeps thereof,
Fire in the heights above,
And crested walls of War!

Others.

As smoke on the wing of heaven
Climbeth and scattereth,
Torn of the spear and driven,
The land crieth for death:
O stormy battlements that red fire hath riven,
And the sword's angry breath!
*[A new thought comes to HECUBA; she kneels
and beats the earth with her hands.]*

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HECUBA.

[*Strophe.*

O Earth, Earth of my children; hearken! and O
mine own,
Ye have hearts and forget not, ye in the darkness
lying!

LEADER.

Now hast thou found thy prayer, crying to them that
are gone.

HECUBA.

Surely my knees are weary, but I kneel above your
head;
Hearken, O ye so silent! My hands beat your bed!

LEADER.

I, I am near thee;
I kneel to thy dead to hear thee,
Kneel to mine own in the darkness; O husband, hear
my crying!

HECUBA.

Even as the beasts they drive, even as the loads they
bear,

LEADER.

(Pain; O pain!)

HECUBA.

We go to the house of bondage. Hear, ye dead, O
hear!

LEADER.

(Go, and come not again!)

THE TROJAN WOMEN

HECUBA.

Priam, mine own Priam,
Lying so lowly,
Thou in thy nothingness,
Shelterless, comfortless,
See'st thou the thing I am?
Know'st thou my bitter stress?

LEADER.

Nay, thou art naught to him!
Out of the strife there came,
Out of the noise and shame,
Making his eyelids dim,
Death, the Most Holy!
[The fire and smoke rise constantly higher.]

HECUBA.

[Antistrophe.]

O high houses of Gods, belovèd streets of my birth,
Ye have found the way of the sword, the fiery and
blood-red river!

LEADER.

Fall, and men shall forget you! Ye shall lie in the
gentle earth.

HECUBA.

The dust as smoke riseth; it spreadeth wide its wing;
It maketh me as a shadow, and my City a vanished
thing!

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LEADER.

Out on the smoke she goeth,
And her name no man knoweth;
And the cloud is northward, southward; Troy is gone
for ever!

*[A great crash is heard, and the Wall is lost in
smoke and darkness.]*

HECUBA.

Ha! Marked ye? Heard ye? The crash of the
towers that fall!

LEADER.

All is gone!

HECUBA.

Wrath in the earth and quaking and a flood that
sweepeth all,

LEADER.

And passeth on!

[The Greek trumpet sounds.]

HECUBA.

Farewell!—O spirit grey,
Whatso is coming,
Fail not from under me.
Weak limbs, why tremble ye?
Forth where the new long day
Dawneth to slavery!

THE TROJAN WOMEN

CHORUS.

Farewell from parting lips,
Farewell!—Come, I and thou,
Whatso may wait us now,
Forth to the long Greek ships
And the sea's foaming.

[*The trumpet sounds again, and the Women go
out in the darkness.*]

NOTES ON THE TROJAN WOMEN

P. 11, l. 5, Poseidon.]—In the *Iliad* Poseidon is the enemy of Troy, here the friend. This sort of confusion comes from the fact that the Trojans and their Greek enemies were largely of the same blood, with the same tribal gods. To the Trojans, Athena the War-Goddess was, of course, *their* War-Goddess, the protectress of their citadel. Poseidon, god of the sea and its merchandise, and Apollo (possibly a local shepherd god?), were their natural friends and had actually built their city wall for love of the good old king, Laomedon. Zeus, the great father, had Mount Ida for his holy hill and Troy for his peculiar city. (Cf. on p. 63.)

To suit the Greek point of view all this had to be changed or explained away. In the *Iliad* generally Athena is the proper War-Goddess of the Greeks. Poseidon had indeed built the wall for Laomedon, but Laomedon had cheated him of his reward—as afterwards he cheated Heracles, and the Argonauts and everybody else! So Poseidon hated Troy. Troy is chiefly defended by the barbarian Ares, the oriental Aphrodite, by its own rivers Scamander and Simoïs and suchlike inferior or unprincipled gods.

Yet traces of the other tradition remain. Homer knows that Athena is specially worshipped in Troy. He knows that Apollo, who had built the wall with Poseidon, and had the same experience of Laomedon, still loves the Trojans. Zeus himself, though eventually in obedience to destiny he permits the fall of the city, nevertheless has a great tenderness towards it.

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P. 11, l. 11, A steed marvellous.]—See below, on p. 36.

P. 12, l. 25, I go forth from great Ilion, &c.]—The correct ancient doctrine. When your gods forsook you, there was no more hope. Conversely, when your state became desperate, evidently your gods were forsaking you. From another point of view, also, when the city was desolate and unable to worship its gods, the gods of that city were no more.

P. 12, l. 34, Laconian Tyndarid.]—Helen was the child of Zeus and Leda, and sister of Castor and Polydeuces; but her human father was Tyndareus, an old Spartan king. She is treated as “a prisoner and a prize,” *i.e.*, as a captured enemy, not as a Greek princess delivered from the Trojans.

P. 12, l. 40, In secret slain.]—Because the Greeks were ashamed of the bloody deed. See below, p. 42, and the scene on this subject in the *Hecuba*.

P. 12, l. 42, Cassandra.]—In the *Agamemnon* the story is more clearly told, that Cassandra was loved by Apollo and endowed by him with the power of prophecy; then in some way she rejected or betrayed him, and he set upon her the curse that though seeing the truth she should never be believed. The figure of Cassandra in this play is not inconsistent with that version, but it makes a different impression. She is here a dedicated virgin, and her mystic love for Apollo does not seem to have suffered any breach.

P. 13, l. 47, Pallas.]—(See above.) The historical explanation of the Trojan Pallas and the Greek Pallas is simple enough; but as soon as the two are mythologically personified and made one, there emerges just such a bitter and ruthless goddess as Euripides, in his revolt against the current mythology, loved to depict. But it is not only the mythology that he is attacking. He seems really to feel that if there are conscious gods ruling the world, they are cruel or “inhuman” beings.

P. 15, l. 70.]—Ajax the Less, son of Oïleus, either ravished or attempted to ravish Cassandra (the story

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occurs in both forms) while she was clinging to the Palladium or image of Pallas. It is one of the great typical sins of the Sack of Troy, often depicted on vases.

P. 17, l. 123, Faces of ships.]—Homeric ships had prows shaped and painted to look like birds' or beasts' heads. A ship was always a wonderfully live and vivid thing to the Greek poets. (Cf. p. 64.)

P. 18, l. 132, Castor.]—Helen's brother: the Eurôtas, the river of her home, Sparta.

P. 18, l. 135, Fifty seeds.]—Priam had fifty children, nineteen of them children of Hecuba (*Il.* vi. 451, &c.).

P. 22, l. 205, Pirene.]—The celebrated spring on the hill of Corinth. Drawing water was a typical employment of slaves.

P. 22, l. 219 ff., Theseus' land, &c.]—Theseus' land is Attica. The poet, in the midst of his bitterness over the present conduct of his city, clings the more to its old fame for humanity. The "land high-born" where the Penêus flows round the base of Mount Olympus in northern Thessaly is one of the haunts of Euripides' dreams in many plays. Cf. *Bacchae*, 410 (p. 97 in my translation). Mount Aetna fronts the "Tyrians' citadel," *i.e.*, Carthage, built by the Phoenicians. The "sister land" is the district of Sybaris in South Italy, where the river Crathis has, or had, a red-gold colour, which makes golden the hair of men and the fleeces of sheep; and the water never lost its freshness.

P. 23, l. 235.]—Talthybius is a loyal soldier with every wish to be kind. But he is naturally in good spirits over the satisfactory end of the war, and his tact is not sufficient to enable him to understand the Trojan Women's feelings. Yet in the end, since he has to see and do the cruelties which his Chiefs only order from a distance, the real nature of his work forces itself upon him, and he feels and speaks at times almost like a Trojan. It is worth noticing how the Trojan Women generally avoid addressing him. (Cf. pp. 48, 67, 74.)

P. 24, l. 256, The haunted keys (literally, "with

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God through them, penetrating them").]—Cassandra was his Key-bearer, holding the door of his Holy Place. (Cf. *Hip.* 540, p. 30.)

P. 25, l. 270, She hath a toil, &c.]—There is something true and pathetic about this curious blindness which prevents Hecuba from understanding "so plain a riddle." (Cf. below, p. 42.) She takes the watching of a Tomb to be some strange Greek custom, and does not seek to have it explained further.

P. 26, l. 277, Odysseus.]—In Euripides generally Odysseus is the type of the successful unscrupulous man, as soldier and politician—the incarnation of what the poet most hated. In Homer of course he is totally different.

P. 27, l. 301, Burn themselves and die.]—Women under these circumstances did commit suicide in Euripides' day, as they have ever since. It is rather curious that none of the characters of the play, not even Andromache, kills herself. The explanation must be that no such suicide was recorded in the tradition (though cf. below, on p. 33); a significant fact, suggesting that in the Homeric age, when this kind of treatment of women captives was regular, the victims did not suffer quite so terribly under it.

P. 28, l. 310, Hymen.]—She addresses the Torch. The shadowy Marriage-god "Hymen" was a torch and a cry as much as anything more personal. As a torch he is the sign both of marriage and of death, of sunrise and of the consuming fire. The full Moon was specially connected with marriage ceremonies.

P. 30, l. 356, Loxias.]—The name of Apollo as an Oracular God.

Pp. 30-34, ll. 360-460, Cassandra's visions.]—The allusions are to the various sufferings of Odysseus, as narrated in the *Odyssey*, and to the tragedies of the house of Atreus, as told for instance in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Agamemnon together with Cassandra, and in part because he brought Cassandra, was murdered—felled with an axe—on his return home by his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Their bodies

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were cast into a pit among the rocks. In vengeance for this, Orestes, Agamemnon's son, committed "mother-murder," and in consequence was driven by the Erinyes (Furies) of his mother into madness and exile.

P. 30, l. 370, This their king so wise.]—Agamemnon made the war for the sake of his brother Menelaus, and slew his daughter, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice at Aulis, to enable the ships to sail for Troy.

P. 31, ll. 394, 398, Hector and Paris.]—The point about Hector is clear, but as to Paris, the feeling that, after all, it was a glory that he and the half-divine Helen loved each other, is scarcely to be found anywhere else in Greek literature. (Cf., however, Isocrates' "Praise of Helen.") Paris and Helen were never idealised like Launcelot and Guinevere, or Tristram and Iseult.

P. 32, l. 423, A wise queen.]—Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus.

P. 33, l. 425, O Heralds, yea, Voices of Death.]—There is a play on the word for "heralds" in the Greek here, which I have evaded by a paraphrase. (*Κῆρ-υκεις* as though from *Κῆρ* the death-spirit, "the one thing abhorred of all mortal men.")

P. 33, l. 430, That in this place she dies.]—The death of Hecuba is connected with a certain heap of stones on the shore of the Hellespont, called *Kunos-sêma*, or "Dog's Tomb." According to one tradition (Eur. *Hec.* 1259 ff.) she threw herself off the ship into the sea; according to another she was stoned by the Greeks for her curses upon the fleet; but in both she is changed after death into a sort of Hell-hound. M. Victor Bérard suggests that the dog first comes into the story owing to the accidental resemblance of the (hypothetical) Semitic word *S'qoulah*, "Stone" or "Stoning," and the Greek *Skulax*, dog. The Homeric Scylla (*Skulla*) was also both a Stone and a Dog (*Phéniciens et Odyssée*, i. 213). Of course in the present passage there is no direct reference to these wild sailor-stories.

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P. 34, l. 456, The wind comes quick.]—*i. e.* The storm of the Prologue. Three Powers: the three Erinyes.

P. 36, l. 511 ff., Chorus.]—The Wooden Horse is always difficult to understand, and seems to have an obscuring effect on the language of poets who treat of it. I cannot help suspecting that the story arises from a real historical incident misunderstood. Troy, we are told, was still holding out after ten years and could not be taken, until at last by the divine suggestions of Athena, a certain Epeios devised a "Wooden Horse."

What was the "device"? According to the *Odyssey* and most Greek poets, it was a gigantic wooden figure of a horse. A party of heroes, led by Odysseus, got inside it and waited. The Greeks made a show of giving up the siege and sailed away, but only as far as Tenedos. The Trojans came out and found the horse, and after wondering greatly what it was meant for and what to do with it, made a breach in their walls and dragged it into the Citadel as a thank-offering to Pallas. In the night the Greeks returned; the heroes in the horse came out and opened the gates, and Troy was captured.

It seems possible that the "device" really was the building of a wooden siege-tower, as high as the walls, with a projecting and revolving neck. Such engines were (1) capable of being used at the time in Asia, as a rare and extraordinary device, because they exist on early Assyrian monuments; (2) certain to be misunderstood in Greek legendary tradition, because they were not used in Greek warfare till many centuries later. (First, perhaps, at the sieges of Perinthus and Byzantium by Philip of Macedon, 340 B.C.)

It is noteworthy that in the great picture by Polygnôtus in the Leschê at Delphi "above the wall of Troy appears the head alone of the Wooden Horse" (*Paus.* x. 26). Aeschylus also (*Ag.* 816) has some obscure phrases pointing in the same direction: "A horse's brood, a shield-bearing people, launched

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with a leap about the Pleiads' setting, sprang clear above the wall," &c. Euripides here treats the horse metaphorically as a sort of war-horse trampling Troy.

P. 37, l. 536, Her that spareth not, Heaven's yokeless rider.]—Athena like a northern Valkyrie, as often in the *Iliad*. If one tries to imagine what Athena, the War-Goddess worshipped by the Athenian mob, was like—what a mixture of bad national passions, of superstition and statecraft, of slip-shod unimaginative idealisation—one may partly understand why Euripides made her so evil. Allegorists and high-minded philosophers might make Athena entirely noble by concentrating their minds on the beautiful elements in the tradition, and forgetting or explaining away all that was savage; he was determined to pin her down to the worst facts recorded of her, and let people worship such a being if they liked!

P. 38, l. 554, To Artemis.]—Maidens at the shrine of Artemis are a fixed datum in the tradition. (Cf. *Hec.* 935 ff.)

P. 39 ff., l. 576 ff., Andromache and Hecuba.]—This very beautiful scene is perhaps marred to most modern readers by an element which is merely a part of the convention of ancient mourning. Each of the mourners cries: "There is no affliction like mine!" and then proceeds to argue, as it were, against the other's counter claim. One can only say that it was, after all, what they expected of each other; and I believe the same convention exists in most places where keening or wailing is an actual practice.

P. 41, l. 604, Even as the sound of a song.]—I have filled in some words which seem to be missing in the Greek here.

Pp. 41-50, Andromache.]—This character is wonderfully studied. She seems to me to be a woman who has not yet shown much character or perhaps had very intense experience, but is only waiting for sufficiently great trials to become a heroine and a saint. There is still a marked element of conventionality in her description of her life with

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Hector; but one feels, as she speaks, that she is already past it. Her character is built up of "*Sophrosyne*," of self-restraint and the love of goodness—qualities which often seem second-rate or even tiresome until they have a sufficiently great field in which to act. Very characteristic is her resolution to make the best, and not the worst, of her life in Pyrrhus' house, with all its horror of suffering and apparent degradation. So is the self-conquest by which she deliberately refrains from cursing her child's murderers, for the sake of the last poor remnant of good she can still do to him, in getting him buried. The nobility of such a character depends largely, of course, on the intensity of the feelings conquered.

It is worth noting, in this connection, that Euripides is contradicting a wide-spread tradition (Robert, *Bild und Lied*, pp. 63 ff.). Andromache, in the pictures of the Sack of Troy, is represented with a great pestle or some such instrument fighting with the Soldiers to rescue Astyanax (*Ἄνδρο-μάχη* = "Man-fighting").

Observe, too, what a climax of drama is reached by means of the very fact that Andromache, to the utmost of her power, tries to do nothing "dramatic," but only what will be best. Her character in Euripides' play, *Andromache*, is, on the whole, similar to this, but less developed.

P. 51, l. 799 ff., In Salamis, filled with the foaming, &c.]—A striking instance of the artistic value of the Greek chorus in relieving an intolerable strain. The relief provided is something much higher than what we ordinarily call "relief"; it is a stream of pure poetry and music in key with the sadness of the surrounding scene, yet, in a way, happy just because it is beautiful. (Cf. note on *Hippolytus*, l. 732.)

The argument of the rather difficult lyric is: "This is not the first time Troy has been taken. Long ago Heracles made war against the old king Laomedon, because he had not given him the immortal steeds that he promised. And Telamon joined him;

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Telamon who might have been happy in his island of Salamis, among the bees and the pleasant waters, looking over the strait to the olive-laden hills of Athens, the beloved City! And they took ship and slew Laomedon. Yea, twice Zeus has destroyed Iliou!

(Second part.) Is it all in vain that our Trojan princes have been loved by the Gods? Ganyimêdês pours the nectar of Zeus in his banquets, his face never troubled, though his motherland is burned with fire! And, to say nothing of Zeus, how can the Goddess of Morning rise and shine upon us uncaring? She loved Tithônus, son of Laomedon, and bore him up from us in a chariot to be her husband in the skies. But all that once made them love us is gone!"

P. 52, l. 833, Pools of thy bathing.]—It is probable that Ganyimêdês was himself originally a pool or a spring on Ida, now a pourer of nectar in heaven.

Pp. 54-63, Menelaus and Helen.]—The meeting of Menelaus and Helen after the taking of Troy was naturally one of the great moments in the heroic legend. The versions, roughly speaking, divide themselves into two. In one (*Little Iliad*, Ar. *Lysistr.* 155, Eur. *Andromache* 628) Menelaus is about to kill her, but as she bares her bosom to the sword, the sword falls from his hand. In the other (Stesichorus, *Sack of Iliou* (?)) Menelaus or some one else takes her to the ships to be stoned, and the men cannot stone her. As Quintus of Smyrna says, "They looked on her as they would on a God!"

Both versions have affected Euripides here. And his Helen has just the magic of the Helen of legend. That touch of the supernatural which belongs of right to the Child of Heaven—a mystery, a gentleness, a strange absence of fear or wrath—is felt through all her words. One forgets to think of her guilt or innocence; she is too wonderful a being to judge, too precious to destroy. This supernatural element, being the thing which, if true, separates Helen from other women, and in a way redeems her, is for that

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reason exactly what Hecuba denies. The controversy has a certain eternal quality about it: the hypothesis of heavenly enchantment and the hypothesis of mere bad behaviour, neither of them entirely convincing! But the very curses of those that hate her make a kind of superhuman atmosphere about Helen in this play; she fills the background like a great well-spring of pain.

This Menelaus, however, is rather different from the traditional Menelaus. Besides being the husband of Helen, he is the typical Conqueror, for whose sake the Greeks fought and to whom the central prize of the war belongs. And we take him at the height of his triumph, the very moment for which he made the war! Hence the peculiar bitterness with which he is treated, his conquest turning to ashes in his mouth, and his love a confused turmoil of hunger and hatred, contemptible and yet terrible.

The exit of the scene would leave a modern audience quite in doubt as to what happened, unless the action were much clearer than the words. But all Athenians knew from the *Odyssey* that the pair were swiftly reconciled, and lived happily together as King and Queen of Sparta.

P. 54, l. 884, [Thou deep base of the world.]—These lines, as a piece of religious speculation, were very famous in antiquity. And dramatically they are most important. All through the play Hecuba is a woman of remarkable intellectual power and of fearless thought. She does not definitely deny the existence of the Olympian gods, like some characters in Euripides, but she treats them as beings that have betrayed her, and whose name she scarcely deigns to speak. It is the very godlessness of Hecuba's fortitude that makes it so terrible and, properly regarded, so noble. (Cf. p. 35 "Why call on things so weak?" and p. 74 "They know, they know . . .") Such Gods were as a matter of fact the moral inferiors of good men, and Euripides will never blind his eyes to their inferiority. And as soon as people see that their

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god is bad, they tend to cease believing in his existence at all. (Hecuba's answer to Helen is not inconsistent with this, it is only less characteristic.)

Behind this Olympian system, however, there is a possibility of some real Providence or impersonal Governance of the world, to which here, for a moment, Hecuba makes a passionate approach. If there is *any* explanation, *any* justice, even in the form of mere punishment of the wicked, she will be content and give worship! But it seems that there is not. Then at last there remains—what most but not all modern freethinkers would probably have begun to doubt at the very beginning—the world of the departed, the spirits of the dead, who are true, and in their dim way love her still (p. 71 “Thy father far away shall comfort thee,” and the last scene of the play).

This last religion, faint and shattered by doubt as it is, represents a return to the most primitive “Pelasgian” beliefs, a worship of the Dead which existed long before the Olympian system, and has long outlived it.

P. 57, l. 922, The fire-brand's image.]—Hecuba, just before Paris' birth, dreamed that she gave birth to a fire-brand. The prophets therefore advised that the babe should be killed; but Priam disobeyed them.

P. 57, l. 924, Three Crowns of Life.]—On the Judgment of Paris see Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 292 ff. Late writers degrade the story into a beauty contest between three thoroughly personal goddesses—and a contest complicated by bribery. But originally the Judgment is rather a Choice between three possible lives, like the Choice of Heracles between Work and Idleness. The elements of the choice vary in different versions: but in general Hera is royalty; Athena is prowess in war or personal merit; Aphrodite, of course, is love. And the goddesses are not really to be distinguished from the gifts they bring. They are what they give, and nothing more. Cf. the wonderful lyric *Androm.* 274 ff., where they come to “a young

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man walking to and fro alone, in an empty hut in the firelight."

There is an extraordinary effect in Helen herself *being* one of the Crowns of Life—a fair equivalent for the throne of the world.

P. 57, l. 940 ff., Alexander . . . Paris.]—Two plays on words in the Greek.

P. 58, l. 956, The old Gate-Warden.]—He and the Watchers are, of course, safely dead. But on the general lines of the tradition it may well be that Helen is speaking the truth. She loved both Menelaus and Paris; and, according to some versions, hated Dêïphobus, the Trojan prince who seized her after Paris' death. There is a reference to Dêïphobus in the MSS. of the play here, but I follow Wilamowitz in thinking it spurious.

Pp. 63 ff., Chorus.]—On the Trojan Zeus see above, on p. 11. Mount Ida caught the rays of the rising sun in some special manner and distributed them to the rest of the world; and in this gleam of heavenly fire the God had his dwelling, which is now the brighter for the flames of his City going up like incense!

Nothing definite is known of the Golden Images and the Moon-Feasts.

P. 64, l. 1088, Towers of the Giants.]—The prehistoric castles of Tiryns and Mycênæ.

P. 65, l. 1111, May Helen be there.]—(Cf. above.) Pitanê was one of the five divisions of Sparta. Athena had a "Bronzen House" on the acropolis of Sparta. Simoïs, of course, the river of Troy.

P. 71, l. 1232, I make thee whole.]—Here as elsewhere Hecuba fluctuates between fidelity to the oldest and most instinctive religion, and a rejection of all Gods.

P. 72, l. 1240, Lo, I have seen the open hand of God.]—The text is, perhaps, imperfect here; but Professor Wilamowitz agrees with me that Hecuba has seen something like a vision. The meaning of this speech is of the utmost importance. It expresses

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the inmost theme of the whole play, a search for an answer to the injustice of suffering in the very splendour and beauty of suffering. Of course it must be suffering of a particular kind, or, what comes to the same thing, suffering borne in a particular way; but in that case the answer seems to me to hold. One does not really think the world evil because there are martyrs or heroes in it. For them the elements of beauty which exist in any great trial of the spirit become so great as to overpower the evil that created them—to turn it from shame and misery into tragedy. Of course to most sufferers, to children and animals and weak people, or those without inspiration, the doctrine brings no help. It is a thing invented by a poet for himself.

P. 75, l. 1288, Thou of the Ages.]—The Phrygian All-Father, identified with Zeus, son of Kronos. (Cf. on p. 11.)

P. 76, l. 1304, Now hast thou found thy prayer.]—The Gods have deserted her, but she has still the dead. (Cf. above, on p. 71.)

P. 79, l. 1332, Forth to the dark Greek ships.]—Curiously like another magnificent ending of a great poem, that of the *Chanson de Roland*, where Charlemagne is called forth on a fresh quest:

“Deus,” dist li Reis, “si penuse est ma vie!”
Pluret des oilz, sa barbe blanche tiret. . . .

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

OF

EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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PREFACE

THE *Iphigenia in Tauris* is not in the modern sense a tragedy; it is a romantic play, beginning in a tragic atmosphere and moving through perils and escapes to a happy end. To the archaeologist the cause of this lies in the ritual on which the play is based. All Greek tragedies that we know have as their nucleus something which the Greeks called an *Aition*—a cause or origin. They all explain some ritual or observance or commemorate some great event. Nearly all, as a matter of fact, have for this *Aition* a Tomb Ritual, as, for instance, the *Hippolytus* has the worship paid by the Trozenian Maidens at that hero's grave. The use of this Tomb Ritual may well explain both the intense shadow of death that normally hangs over the Greek tragedies, and also perhaps the feeling of the Fatality, which is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be prominent in them. For if you are actually engaged in commemorating your hero's funeral, it follows that all through the story, however bright his prospects may seem, you feel that he is bound to die; he cannot escape. A good many tragedies, however, are built not on Tomb Rituals but on other sacred *Aitia*: on the foundation of a city, like the *Aetnae*, the ritual of the torch-race, like the *Prometheus*; on some great legendary succouring of the oppressed, like the *Suppliant Women* of Aeschylus

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and Euripides. And the rite on which the *Iphigenia* is based is essentially one in which a man is brought to the verge of death but just does not die.

The rite is explained in ll. 1450 ff. of the play. On a certain festival at Halae in Attica a human victim was led to the altar of Artemis Tauropolos, touched on the throat with a sword and then set free: very much what happened to Orestes among the Tauri, and exactly what happened to Iphigenia at Aulis. Both legends have doubtless grown out of the same ritual.

Like all the great Greek legends, the Iphigenia myths take many varying forms. They are all of them, in their essence, conjectural restorations, by poets or other 'wise men,' of supposed early history. According to the present play, Agamemnon, when just about to sail with all the powers of Greece against Troy, was bound by weather at Aulis. The medicine-man Calchas explained that Artemis demanded the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia, who was then at home with her mother, Clytemnestra. Odysseus and Agamemnon sent for the maiden on the pretext that she was to be married to the famous young hero, Achilles; she was brought to Aulis and treacherously slaughtered—or, at least, so people thought.

There is a subject for tragedy there; and it was brilliantly treated in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which was probably left unfinished at his death. But our play chooses a later moment of the story.

In reality Artemis at the last moment saved Iphigenia, rapt her away from mortal eyes and set her down in the land of the Tauri to be her priestess. (*In Tauris* is only the Latin for "among the Tauri.")

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These Tauri possessed an image of Artemis which had fallen from heaven, and kept up a savage rite of sacrificing to it all strangers who were cast on their shores. Iphigenia, obedient to her goddess, and held by "the spell of the altar," had to consecrate the victims as they went in to be slain. So far only barbarian strangers had come: she waited half in horror, half in a rage of revenge, for the day when she should have to sacrifice a Greek. The first Greek that came was her own brother, Orestes, who had been sent by Apollo to take the image of Artemis and bear it to Attica, where it should no more be stained with human sacrifice.

If we try to turn from these myths to the historical facts that underly them, we may conjecture that there were three goddesses of the common Aegean type, worshipped in different places. At Brauron and elsewhere there was Iphigenia ('Birth-mighty'); at Halae there was the Tauropolos ('the Bull-rider,' like Europa, who rode on the hornèd Moon); among the savage and scarcely known Tauri there was some goddess to whom shipwrecked strangers were sacrificed. Lastly there came in the Olympian Artemis. Now all these goddesses (except possibly the Taurian, of whom we know little) were associated with the Moon and with childbirth, and with rites for sacrificing or redeeming the first-born. Naturally enough, therefore, they were all gradually absorbed by the prevailing worship of Artemis. Tauropolos became an epithet of Artemis, Iphigenîa became her priestess and 'Keybearer.' And the word 'Tauropolos,' which had become obscure, was explained as a reference to the Tauri. The old rude

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image of Tauropolos had come from the Tauri, and the strange ritual was descended from their bloody rites. So the Taurian goddess must be Artemis too. The tendency of ancient polytheism, when it met with some alien religion, was not to treat the alien gods as entirely new persons, but, assuming the real and obvious existence of their own gods, to inquire by what names and with what ritual the strangers worshipped them.

As usual in Euripides, the central character of this play is a woman, and a woman most unsparingly yet lovingly studied. Iphigenia is no mere 'sympathetic heroine.' She is a worthy member of her great but sinister house; a haggard and exiled woman, eating out her heart in two conflicting emotions: intense longing for home and all that she had loved in childhood, and bitter self-pitying rage against 'her murderers.' The altar of Aulis is constantly in her thoughts. She does not know whether to hate her father, but at least she can with a clear conscience hate all the rest of those implicated, Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus, and most fiercely, though somewhat unjustly, Helen. All the good women in Euripides go wild at the name of Helen. Iphigenia broods on her wrongs till she can see nothing else; she feels as if she hated all Greeks, and lived only for revenge, for the hope of some day slaughtering Greeks at her altar, as pitilessly as they slaughtered her at Aulis. She knows how horrible this state of mind is, but she is now "turned to stone, and has no pity left in her." Then the Greeks come; and even before she knows who they really are, the hard shell of her bitterness slowly yields. Her

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heart goes out to them; she draws Orestes against his will into talk; she insists on pitying him, insists on his pitying her; and eventually determines, come what may, that she will save at least the one stranger that she has talked with most. Presently comes the discovery who the strangers are; and she is at once ready to die with them or for them.

As for the scene in which Iphigenia befools Thoas, my moral feelings may be obtuse, but I certainly cannot feel the slightest compunction or shock at the heavy lying. Which of us would not expect at least as much from his own sister, if it lay with her to save him from the altars of Benin or Ashanti? I suspect that the good people who lament over "the low standard of truthfulness shown by even the most enlightened pagans" have either forgotten the days when they read stories of adventure, or else have not, in reading this scene, realised properly the strain of hairbreadth peril that lies behind the comedy of it. A single slip in Iphigenia's tissue of desperate improvisations would mean death, and not to herself alone. One feels rather sorry for Thoas, certainly, and he is a very fine fellow in his way; but a person who insists on slaughtering strangers cannot expect those strangers or their friends to treat him with any approach to candour.

The two young men come nearer to mere ideal *héros de roman* than any other characters in Euripides. They are surprisingly handsome and brave and unselfish and everything that they should be; and they stand out like heroes against the mob of cowardly little Taurians in the Herdsman's speech. Yet they have none of the

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unreality that is usual in such figures. The shadow of madness and guilt hanging over Orestes makes a difference. At his first entrance, when danger is still far off, he is a mass of broken nerves; he depends absolutely on Pylades. In the later scenes, when they are face to face with death, the underlying strength of the son of the Great King asserts itself and makes one understand why, for all his madness, Orestes is the chief, and Pylades only the devoted follower.

Romantic plays with happy endings are almost of necessity inferior in artistic value to true tragedies. Not, one would hope, simply because they end happily; happiness in itself is certainly not less beautiful than grief; but because a tragedy in its great moments can generally afford to be sincere, while romantic plays live in an atmosphere of ingenuity and make-believe. The *Iphigenia* is not of the same order as *The Trojan Women*. Yet it is a delightful play; subtle, ever-changing, full of movement and poignancy. The recognition scene became to Aristotle a model of what such a scene should be; and the long passage before it, from the entrance of the two princes onward, seems to me one of the most skilful and fascinating in Greek drama.

And after all the adventure of Euripides is not quite like that of the average romantic writer. It is shot through by reflection, by reality and by sadness. There is a shadow that broods over the *Iphigenia*, though it is not the shadow of death. It is exile, homesickness. Iphigenia, Orestes, the Women of the Chorus, are all exiles, all away from their heart's home, among savage people

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and cruel gods. They wait on the shore while the sea-birds take wing for Hellas, out beyond the barrier of the Dark-Blue Rocks and the great stretches of magical and 'unfriended' sea. Nearly all the lyrics are full of sea-light and the clash of waters, and the lyrics are usually the very soul of Euripidean tragedy.

G. M.

THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

IPHIGENÎA, *eldest daughter of Agamemnon, King of Argos; supposed to have been sacrificed by him to Artemis at Aulis.*

ORESTES, *her brother; pursued by Furies for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, who had murdered Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *Prince of Phocis, friend to Orestes.*

THOAS, *King of Tauris, a savage country beyond the Symplêgades.*

A HERDSMAN.

A MESSENGER

CHORUS of Captive Greek Women, handmaids to Iphigenia.

The Goddess PALLAS ATHENA.

The play was first performed between the years 414 and 412 B.C.

THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

The Scene shows a great and barbaric Temple on a desolate sea-coast. An altar is visible stained with blood. There are spoils of slain men hanging from the roof. IPHIGENIA, in the dress of a Priestess, comes out from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Child of the man of torment and of pride
Tantalid Pelops bore a royal bride
On flying steeds from Pisa. Thence did spring
Atreus : from Atreus, linkèd king with king,
Menelaüs, Agamemnon. His am I
And Clytemnestra's child : whom cruelly
At Aulis, where the strait of shifting blue
Frets with quick winds, for Helen's sake he slew,
Or thinks to have slain ; such sacrifice he swore
To Artemis on that deep-bosomed shore.

For there Lord Agamemnon, hot with joy
To win for Greece the crown of conquered Troy,
For Menelaüs' sake through all distress
Pursuing Helen's vanished loveliness,
Gathered his thousand ships from every coast
Of Hellas : when there fell on that great host
Storms and despair of sailing. Then the King
Sought signs of fire, and Calchas answering

Spake thus: "O Lord of Hellas, from this shore
No ship of thine may move for evermore,
Till Artemis receive in gift of blood
Thy child, Iphigenîa. Long hath stood
Thy vow, to pay to Her that bringeth light
Whatever birth most fair by day or night
The year should bring. That year thy queen did bear
A child—whom here I name of all most fair.
See that she die."

So from my mother's side
By lies Odysseus won me, to be bride
In Aulis to Achilles. When I came,
They took me and above the altar flame
Held, and the sword was swinging to the gash,
When, lo, out of their vision in a flash
Artemis rapt me, leaving in my place
A deer to bleed; and on through a great space
Of shining sky upbore and in this town
Of Tauris the Unfriended set me down;
Where o'er a savage people savagely
King Thoas rules. This is her sanctuary
And I her priestess. Therefore, by the rite
Of worship here, wherein she hath delight—
Though fair in naught but name. . . . But Artemis
Is near; I speak no further. Mine it is
To consecrate and touch the victim's hair;
Doings of blood unspoken are the care
Of others, where her inmost chambers lie.
Ah me!
But what dark dreams, thou clear and morning sky,
I have to tell thee, could that bring them ease!
Meseemed in sleep, far over distant seas,

I lay in Argos, and about me slept
My maids: and, lo, the level earth was swept
With quaking like the sea. Out, out I fled,
And, turning, saw the cornice overhead
Reel, and the beams and mighty door-trees down
In blocks of ruin round me overthrown.
One single oaken pillar, so I dreamed,
Stood of my father's house; and hair, meseemed,
Waved from its head all brown: and suddenly
A human voice it had, and spoke. And I,
Fulfilling this mine office, built on blood
Of unknown men, before that pillar stood,
And washed him clean for death, mine eyes astream
With weeping.

And this way I read my dream.

Orestes is no more: on him did fall
My cleansing drops.—The pillar of the hall
Must be the man first-born; and they on whom
My cleansing falls, their way is to the tomb.

Therefore to my dead brother will I pour
Such sacrifice, I on this bitter shore
And he beyond great seas, as still I may,
With all those maids whom Thoas bore away
In war from Greece and gave me for mine own.
But wherefore come they not? I must be gone
And wait them in the temple, where I dwell.

[She goes into the Temple.]

And - part.

VOICE.

Did some one cross the pathway? Guard thee well.

ANOTHER VOICE.

I am watching. Every side I turn mine eye.

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES. Their dress shows they are travellers: ORESTES is shaken and distraught.

ORESTES.

How, brother? And is this the sanctuary
At last, for which we sailed from Argolis?

PYLADES.

For sure, Orestes. Seest thou not it is?

ORESTES.

The altar, too, where Hellene blood is shed.

PYLADES.

How like long hair those blood-stains, tawny red!

ORESTES.

And spoils of slaughtered men—there by the thatch.

PYLADES.

Aye, first-fruits of the harvest, when they catch
Their strangers!—'Tis a place to search with care.

[He searches, while ORESTES sits.]

ORESTES.

O God, where hast thou brought me? What new snare

Is this?—I slew my mother ; I avenged
My father at thy bidding ; I have ranged
A homeless world, hunted by shapes of pain,
And circling trod in mine own steps again.
At last I stood once more before thy throne
And cried thee question, what thing should be done
To end these miseries, wherein I reel
Through Hellas, mad, lashed like a burning wheel ;
And thou didst bid me seek . . . what land but this
Of Tauri, where thy sister Artemis
Her altar hath, and seize on that divine
Image which fell, men say, into this shrine
From heaven. This I must seize by chance or plot
Or peril—clearer word was uttered not—
And bear to Attic earth. If this be done,
I should have peace from all my malison.

Lo, I have done thy will. I have pierced the seas
Where no Greek man may live.—Ho, Pylades,
Sole sharer of my quest : hast seen it all?
What can we next? Thou seest this circuit wall
Enormous? Must we climb the public stair,
With all men watching? Shall we seek somewhere
Some lock to pick, some secret bolt or bar—
Of all which we know nothing? Where we are,
If one man mark us, if they see us prize
The gate, or think of entrance anywise,
'Tis death.—We still have time to fly for home :
Back to the galley quick, ere worse things come !

PYLADES.

To fly we dare not, brother. 'Twere a thing
Not of our custom ; and ill work, to bring

God's word to such reviling.—Let us leave
The temple now, and gather in some cave
Where glooms the cool sea ripple. But not where
The ship lies; men might chance to see her there
And tell some chief; then certain were our doom.
But when the fringed eye of Night be come
Then we must dare, by all ways foul or fine,
To thief that wondrous Image from its shrine.
Ah, see; far up, between each pair of beams
A hollow one might creep through! Danger gleams
Like sunshine to a brave man's eyes, and fear
Of what may be is no help anywhere.

ORESTES.

Aye; we have never braved these leagues of way
To falter at the end. See, I obey
Thy words. They are ever wise. Let us go mark
Some cavern, to lie hid till fall of dark.
God will not suffer that bad things be stirred
To mar us now, and bring to naught the word
Himself hath spoke. Aye, and no peril brings
Pardon for turning back to sons of kings.

*[They go out towards the shore. After they
are gone, enter gradually the WOMEN
OF THE CHORUS.]*

CHORUS.

Peace! Peace upon all who dwell
By the Sister Rocks that clash in the swell
Of the Friendless Seas.

O Child of Leto, thou,
 Dictynna mountain-born,
 To the cornice gold-inlaid
 To the pillared sanctities,
 We come in the cold of morn,
 We come with virgin brow,
 Pure as our oath was sworn,
 Handmaids of thine handmaid
 Who holdeth the stainless keys.

From Hellas, that once was ours,
 We come before thy gate,
 From the land of the western seas,
 The horses and the towers,
 The wells and the garden trees,
 And the seats where our fathers sate.

LEADER.

What tidings, ho? With what intent
 Hast called me to thy shrine and thee,
 O child of him who crossed the sea
 To Troy with that great armament,
 The thousand prow, the myriad swords?
 I come, O child of Atreid Lords.

[IPHIGENIA, *followed by ATTENDANTS,*
comes from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, O maidens mine,
 I am filled full of tears:
 My heart filled with the beat
 Of tears, as of dancing feet,

A lyreless joyless line,
And music meet for the dead.

For a whisper is in mine ears,
By visions borne on the breath
Of the Night that now is fled,
Of a brother gone to death.
Oh sorrow and weeping sore,
For the house that no more is,
For the dead that were kings of yore
And the labour of Argolis!

[She begins the Funeral Rite.]

O Spirit, thou unknown,
Who bearest on dark wings
My brother, my one, mine own,
I bear drink-offerings,
And the cup that bringeth ease
Flowing through Earth's deep breast;
Milk of the mountain kine,
The hallowed gleam of wine,
The toil of murmuring bees:
By these shall the dead have rest.

To an ATTENDANT.

The golden goblet let me pour,
And that which Hades thirsteth for.

O branch of Agamemnon's tree
Beneath the earth, as to one dead,
This cup of love I pour to thee.
Oh, pardon, that I may not shed

One lock of hair to wreathe thy tomb,
 One tear : so far, so far am I
 From what to me and thee was home,
 And where in all men's fantasy,
 Butchered, O God ! I also lie.

CHORUS.

Woe ; woe : I too with refluent melody,
 An echo wild of the dirges of the Asian,
 I, thy bond maiden, cry to answer thee :
 The music that lieth hid in lamentation,
 The song that is heard in the deep hearts of the dead,
 That the Lord of dead men 'mid his dancing singeth,
 And never joy-cry, never joy it bringeth ;
 Woe for the house of Kings in desolation,
 Woe for the light of the sceptre vanishèd.

From kings in Argos of old, from joyous kings,
 The beginning came :
 Then peril swift upon peril, flame on flame :
 The dark and wheeling coursers, as wild with wings,
 The cry of one betrayed on a drowning shore,
 The sun that blanched in heaven, the world that
 changed—
 Evil on evil and none alone !—deranged
 By the Golden Lamb and the wrong grown ever more ;
 Blood following blood, sorrow on sorrow sore !
 So come the dead of old, the dead in wrath,
 Back on the seed of the high Tantalidae ;
 Surely the Spirit of Life an evil path
 Hath hewed for thee.

IPHIGENIA.

From the beginning the Spirit of my life
Was an evil spirit. Alas for my mother's zone,
And the night that bare me! From the beginning
Strife,
As a book to read, Fate gave me for mine own.
They wooed a bride for the strikers down of Troy—
Thy first-born, Mother: was it for this, thy prayer?—
A hind of slaughter to die in a father's snare,
Gift of a sacrifice where none hath joy.

They set me on a royal wane;
Down the long sand they led me on,
A bride new-decked, a bride of bane,
In Aulis to the Nereid's son.
And now estranged for evermore
Beyond the far estranging foam
I watch a flat and herbless shore,
Unloved, unchilded, without home
Or city: never more to meet
For Hera's dance with Argive maids,
Nor round the loom 'mid singing sweet
Make broideries and storied braids,
Of writhing giants overthrown
And clear-eyed Pallas. . . . All is gone!
Red hands and ever-ringing ears:
The blood of men that friendless die,
The horror of the strangers' cry
Unheard, the horror of their tears.

But now, let even that have rest:
I weep for him in Argos slain,

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The brother whom I knew, Ah me,
A babe, a flower ; and yet to be—
There on his mother's arms and breast—
The crowned Orestes, lord of men !

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Stay, yonder from some headland of the sea
There comes—methinks a herdsman, seeking thee.

Enter a HERDSMAN. IPHIGENIA is still on her knees.

HERDSMAN.

Daughter of Clytemnestra and her king,
Give ear ! I bear news of a wondrous thing.

IPHIGENIA.

What news, that should so mar my obsequies?

HERDSMAN.

A ship hath passed the blue Symplêgades,
And here upon our coast two men are thrown,
Young, bold, good slaughter for the altar-stone
Of Artemis ! *[She rises.]*

Make all the speed ye may ;
'Tis not too much. The blood-bowl and the spray !

IPHIGENIA.

Men of what nation ? Doth their habit show ?

HERDSMAN.

Hellenes for sure, but that is all we know.

IPHIGENIA.

No name? No other clue thine ear could seize?

HERDSMAN.

We heard one call his comrade "Pylades."

IPHIGENIA.

Yes. And the man who spoke—his name was what?

HERDSMAN.

None of us heard. I think they spoke it not.

IPHIGENIA.

How did ye see them first, how make them fast?

HERDSMAN.

Down by the sea, just where the surge is cast. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

The sea? What is the sea to thee and thine?

HERDSMAN.

We came to wash our cattle in the brine.

IPHIGENIA.

Go back, and tell how they were taken; show
The fashion of it, for I fain would know
All.—'Tis so long a time, and never yet,
Never, hath Greek blood made this altar wet.

HERDSMAN.

We had brought our forest cattle where the seas
Break in long tides from the Symplêgades.

A bay is there, deep eaten by the surge
 And hollowed clear, with cover **near the verge**
 Where purple-fishers camp. These twain were there
 When one of mine own men, a forager,
 Spied them, and tiptoed whispering back: "God save
 Us now! Two things unearthly by the wave
 Sitting!" We looked, and one of pious mood
 Raised up his hands to heaven and praying stood:
 "Son of the white Sea Spirit, high in rule,
 Storm-lord Palaemon, Oh, be merciful:
 Or sit ye there the warrior twins of Zeus,
 Or something loved of Him, from whose great thews
 Was born the Nereids' fifty-fluted choir."

Another, flushed with folly and the fire
 Of lawless daring, laughed aloud and swore
 'Twas shipwrecked sailors skulking on the shore,
 Our rule and custom here being known, to slay
 All strangers. And most thought this was the way
 To follow, and seek out for Artemis
 The blood-gift of our people.

Just at this
 One of the strangers started from his seat,
 And stood, and upward, downward, with a beat
 His head went, and he groaned, and all his arm
 Trembled. Then, as a hunter gives alarm,
 He shrieked, stark mad and raving: "Pylades,
 Dost see her there?—And there—Oh, no one sees!—
 A she-dragon of Hell, and all her head
 Agape with fangèd asps, to bite me dead.
 She hath no face, but somewhere from her cloak
 Bloweth a wind of fire and bloody smoke:
 The wings' beat fans it: in her arms, Ah see!
 My mother, dead grey stone, to cast on me

And crush. . . . Help, help! They crowd on me
behind. . . ."

No shapes at all were there. 'Twas his sick mind
Which turned the herds that lowed and barking hounds
That followed, to some visionary sounds
Of Furies. For ourselves, we did but sit
And watch in silence, wondering if the fit
Would leave him dead. When suddenly out shone
His sword, and like a lion he leaped upon
Our herds, to fight his Furies! Flank and side
He stabbed and smote them, till the foam was dyed
Red at the waves' edge. Marry, when we saw
The cattle hurt and falling, no more law
We gave, but sprang to arms and blew the horn
For help—so strong they looked and nobly born
For thralls like us to meet, that pair unknown.

Well, a throng gathered ere much time was gone;
When suddenly the whirl of madness slips
From off him and he falls, quite weak, his lips
Dropping with foam. When once we saw him fall
So timely, we were at him one and all
To pelt and smite. The other watched us come,
But knelt and wiped those lips all dank with foam
And tended the sick body, while he held
His cloak's good web above him for a shield;
So cool he was to ward off every stone
And all the while care for that stricken one.

Then rose the fallen man, calm now and grave,
Looked, and saw battle bursting like a wave
That bursts, and knew that peril close at hand
Which now is come, and groaned. On every hand

We stood, and stoned and stoned, and ceased not. Aye,
'Twas then we heard that fearful battle-cry:

"Ho, Pylades, 'tis death! But let it be
A gallant death! Draw sword and follow me."

When those two swords came flashing, up the glen
Through the loose rocks we scattered back; but when
One band was flying, down by rocks and trees
Came others pelting: did they turn on these,
Back stole the first upon them, stone on stone.
'Twas past belief: of all those shots not one
Struck home. The goddess kept her fated prey
Perfect. Howbeit, at last we made our way
Right, left and round behind them on the sands,
And rushed, and beat the swords out of their hands,
So tired they scarce could stand. Then to the king
We bore them both, and he, not tarrying,
Sends them to thee, to touch with holy spray—
And then the blood-bowl!

I have heard thee pray,
Priestess, ere now for such a draft as this.
Aye, slay but these two chiefs to Artemis
And Hellas shall have paid thy debt, and know
What blood was spilt in Aulis long ago.

LEADER.

I marvel that one mad, whose'er he be,
Should sail from Hellas to the Friendless Sea.

IPHIGENIA

'Tis well. Let thy hand bring them, and mine own
Shall falter not till here God's will be done.

[Exit HERDSMAN

O suffering heart, not fierce thou wast of old
To shipwrecked men. Nay, pities manifold
Held thee in fancy homeward, lest thy hand
At last should fall on one of thine own land.
But now, for visions that have turned to stone
My heart, to know Orestes sees the sun
No more, a cruel woman waits you here,
Whoe'er ye be, and one without a tear.

'Tis true: I know by mine own evil will:
One long in pain, if things more suffering still
Fall to his hand, will hate them for his own
Torment. . . . And no great wind hath ever blown,
No ship from God hath passed the Clashing Gate,
To bring me Helen, who hath earned my hate,
And Menelaus, till I mocked their prayers
In this new Aulis, that is mine, not theirs:
Where Greek hands held me lifted, like a beast
For slaughter, and my throat bled. And the priest
My father! . . . Not one pang have I forgot.

Ah me, the blind half-prisoned arms I shot
This way and that, to find his beard, his knees,
Groping and wondering: "Father, what are these
For bridal rites? My mother even now
Mid Argive women sings for me, whom thou . . .
What dost thou? S h e sings happy songs, and all
Is dance and sound of piping in the hall;
And here. . . . Is he a vampyre, is he one
That fattens on the dead, thy Peleus' son—
Whose passion shaken like a torch before
My leaping chariot, lured me to this shore
To wed—"

Ah me! And I had hid my face,
Burning, behind my veil. I would not press

Orestes to my arms . . . who now is slain! . . .
 I would not kiss my sister's lips again,
 For shame and fulness of the heart to meet
 My bridegroom. All my kisses, all my sweet
 Words were stored up and hid: I should come back
 So soon to Argos!

And thou, too: alack,
 Brother, if dead thou art, from what high things
 Thy youth is outcast, and the pride of kings
 Fallen!

And this the goddess deemeth good!
 If ever mortal hand be dark with blood;
 Nay, touch a new-made mother or one slain
 In war, her ban is on him. 'Tis a stain
 She driveth from her outer walls; and then
 Herself doth drink this blood of slaughtered men?
 Could ever Leto, she of the great King
 Beloved, be mother to so gross a thing?
 These tales be lies, false as those feastings wild
 Of Tantalus and Gods that tore a child.
 This land of murderers to its god hath given
 Its own lust; evil dwelleth not in heaven.

[She goes into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

Dark of the sea, dark of the sea, *[Strophe 1.]*
 Gates of the warring water,
 One, in the old time, conquered you,
 A wingèd passion that burst the blue,
 When the West was shut and the Dawn lay free
 To the pain of Inachus' daughter.

But who be these, from where the rushes blow
 On pale Eurôtas, from pure Dirce's flow,
 That turn not neither falter,
 Seeking Her land, where no man breaketh bread,
 Her without pity, round whose virgin head
 Blood on the pillars rusts from long ago,
 Blood on the ancient altar.

[*Antistrophe* 1.]

A flash of the foam, a flash of the foam,
 A wave on the oarblade welling,
 And out they passed to the heart of the blue:
 A chariot shell that the wild winds drew.
 Is it for passion of gold they come,
 Or pride to make great their dwelling?

For sweet is Hope, yea, to much mortal woe
 So sweet that none may turn from it nor go,
 Whom once the far voice calleth,
 To wander through fierce peoples and the gleam
 Of desolate seas, in every heart a dream:
 And these she maketh empty die, and, lo,
 To that man's hand she falleth.

[*Strophe* 2.]

Through the Clashing Rocks they burst:
 They passed by the Cape unsleeping
 Of Phineus' sons accurst:
 They ran by the star-lit bay
 Upon magic surges sweeping,
 Where folk on the waves astray
 Have seen, through the gleaming grey,
 Ring behind ring, men say,
 The dance of the old Sea's daughters.

The guiding oar abaft
 It rippled and it dinned,
 And now the west wind laughed
 And now the south-west wind;
 And the sail was full in flight,
 And they passed by the Island White:

Birds, birds, everywhere,
 White as the foam, light as the air;
 And ghostly Achilles raceth there,
 Far in the Friendless Waters.

[*Antistrophe* 2.]

Ah, would that Leda's child . . .
 (So prayeth the priestess maiden)
 From Troy, that she beguiled,
 Hither were borne, to know
 What sin on her soul is laden!
 Hair twisted, throat held low,
 Head back for the blood to flow,
 To die by the sword." . . . Ah no!
 One hope my soul yet hideth.

A sail, a sail from Greece,
 Fearless to cross the sea,
 With ransom and with peace
 To my sick captivity.
 O home, to see thee still,
 And the old walls on the hill!

Dreams, dreams, gather to me!
Bear me on wings over the sea;
O joy of the night, to slave and free,
One good thing that abideth!

LEADER.

But lo, the twain whom Thoas sends,
Their arms in bondage graspèd sore;
Strange offering this, to lay before
The Goddess! Hold your peace, O friends.

Onward, still onward, to this shrine
They lead the first-fruits of the Greek.
'Twas true, the tale he came to speak,
That watcher of the mountain kine.

O holy one, if it afford
Thee joy, what these men bring to thee,
Take thou their sacrifice, which we,
By law of Hellas, hold abhorred.

*Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, bound, and guarded by
TAURIANS. Re-enter IPHIGENIA.*

IPHIGENIA.

So be it.
My foremost care must be that nothing harms
The temple's holy rule.—Untie their arms.
That which is hallowed may no more be bound.
You, to the shrine within! Let all be found
As the law bids, and as we need this day.

*[ORESTES and PYLADES are set free; some
ATTENDANTS go into the Temple.]*

Ah me!

What mother then was yours, O strangers, say,
And father? And your sister, if you have
A sister: both at once, so young and brave
To leave her brotherless! Who knows when heaven
May send that fortune? For to none is given
To know the coming nor the end of woe;
So dark is God, and to great darkness go
His paths, by blind chance mazèd from our ken.

Whence are ye come, O most unhappy men?
From some far home, methinks, ye have found this
shore

And far shall stay from home for evermore.

ORESTES.

Why weepest thou, woman, to make worse the smart
Of that which needs must be, whoe'er thou art?
I count it not for gentleness, when one
Who means to slay, seeks first to make undone
By pity that sharp dread. Nor praise I him,
With hope long dead, who sheddeth tears to dim
The pain that grips him close. The evil so
Is doubled into twain. He doth but show
His feeble heart, and, as he must have died,
Dies.—Let ill fortune float upon her tide
And weep no more for us. What way this land
Worships its god we know and understand.

IPHIGENIA.

Say first . . . which is it men call Pylades?

ORESTES.

'Tis this man's name, if that will give thee ease.

IPHIGENIA.

From what walled town of Hellas cometh he?

ORESTES.

Enough!—How would the knowledge profit thee?

IPHIGENIA.

Are ye two brethren of one mother born?

ORESTES.

No, not in blood. In love we are brothers sworn.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou also hast a name: tell me thereof.

ORESTES.

Call me Unfortunate. 'Tis name enough.

IPHIGENIA.

I asked not that. Let that with Fortune lie.

ORESTES.

Fools cannot laugh at them that nameless die.

IPHIGENIA.

Why grudge me this? Hast thou such mighty fame?

ORESTES.

My body, if thou wilt, but not my name.

IPHIGENIA.

Nor yet the land of Greece where thou wast bred?

ORESTES.

What gain to have told it thee, when I am dead?

IPHIGENIA.

Nay: why shouldst thou deny so small a grace?

ORESTES.

Know then, great Argos was my native place.

IPHIGENIA.

Stranger! The truth! . . . From Argos art thou
come?

ORESTES.

Mycenae, once a rich land, was my home.

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis banishment that brings thee here—or what?

ORESTES.

A kind of banishment, half forced, half sought.

IPHIGENIA

Wouldst thou but tell me all I need of thee!

ORESTES.

'Twere not much added to my misery.

IPHIGENIA.

From Argos! . . . Oh, how sweet to see thee here!

ORESTES.

Enjoy it, then. To me 'tis sorry cheer.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou knowest the name of Troy? Far doth it flit.

ORESTES.

Would God I had not; nay, nor dreamed of it.

IPHIGENIA.

Men fable it is fallen beneath the sword?

ORESTES.

Fallen it is. Thou hast heard no idle word.

IPHIGENIA.

Fallen! At last!—And Helen taken too?

ORESTES.

Aye; on an evil day for one I knew.

vv. 523-531 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA.

Where is she? I too have some anger stored. . . .

ORESTES.

In Sparta! Once more happy with her lord!

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, hated of all Greece, not only me!

ORESTES.

I too have tasted of her wizardry.

IPHIGENIA.

And came the armies home, as the tales run?

ORESTES.

To answer that were many tales in one.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, give me this hour full! Thou wilt soon die.

ORESTES.

Ask, if such longing holds thee. I will try.

IPHIGENIA.

A seer called Calchas! Did he ever come . . . ?

ORESTES.

Calchas is dead, as the news went at home.

IPHIGENIA.

Good news, ye gods!—Odysseus, what of him?

ORESTES.

Not home yet, but still living, as men deem.

IPHIGENIA.

Curse him! And may he see his home no more.

ORESTES.

Why curse him? All his house is stricken sore.

IPHIGENIA.

How hath the Nereid's son, Achilles, sped?

ORESTES.

Small help his bridal brought him! He is dead.

IPHIGENIA.

A false fierce bridal, so the sufferers tell!

ORESTES.

Who art thou, questioning of Greece so well?

IPHIGENIA.

I was Greek. Evil caught me long ago.

ORESTES.

Small wonder, then, thou hast such wish to know.

IPHIGENIA.

That war-lord, whom they call so high in bliss. . . .

ORESTES.

None such is known to me. What name was his?

IPHIGENIA.

They called him Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

ORESTES.

I know not. Cease.—My questioning is done.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twill be such joy to me! How fares he? Tell!

ORESTES.

Dead. And hath wrecked another's life as well.

IPHIGENIA.

Dead? By what dreadful fortune? Woe is me!

ORESTES.

Why sighst thou? Had he any link with thee?

IPHIGENIA.

I did but think of his old joy and pride.

ORESTES.

His own wife foully stabbed him, and he died.

IPHIGENIA.

O God!
I pity her that slew . . . and him that slew.

ORESTES.

Now cease thy questions. Add no word thereto.

IPHIGENIA.

But one word. Lives she still, that hapless wife?

ORESTES.

No. Her own son, her first-born, took her life.

IPHIGENIA.

O shipwrecked house! What thought was in his brain?

ORESTES.

Justice on her, to avenge his father slain.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas!
A bad false duty bravely hath he wrought.

ORESTES.

Yet God, for all his duty, helps him not.

vv. 561-569 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA.

And not one branch of Atreus' tree lives on?

ORESTES.

Electra lives, unmated and alone.

IPHIGENIA.

The child they slaughtered . . . is there word of her?

ORESTES.

Why, no, save that she died in Aulis there.

IPHIGENIA.

Poor child! Poor father, too, who killed and lied!

ORESTES.

For a bad woman's worthless sake she died.

IPHIGENIA.

The dead king's son, lives he in Argos still?

ORESTES.

He lives, now here, now nowhere, bent with ill.

IPHIGENIA.

O dreams, light dreams, farewell! Ye too were lies.

ORESTES.

Aye; the gods too, whom mortals deem so wise,
Are nothing clearer than some wingèd dream;
And all their ways, like man's ways, but a stream
Of turmoil. He who cares to suffer least,
Not blind, as fools are blinded, by a priest,
Goes straight . . . to what death, those who know him
know.

LEADER.

We too have kinsmen dear, but, being low,
None heedeth, live they still or live they not.

IPHIGENIA (*with sudden impulse*).

Listen! For I am fallen upon a thought,
Strangers, of some good use to you and me,
Both. And 'tis thus most good things come to be,
When different eyes hold the same way for fair.

Stranger, if I can save thee, wilt thou bear
To Argos and the friends who loved my youth
Some word? There is a tablet which, in ruth
For me and mine ill works, a prisoner wrote,
Ta'en by the king in war. He knew 'twas not
My will that craved for blood, but One on high
Who holds it righteous her due prey shall die.
And since that day no Greek hath ever come
Whom I could save and send to Argos home
With prayer for help to any friend: but thou,
I think, dost loathe me not; and thou dost know
Mycenae and the names that fill my heart.
Help me! Be saved! Thou also hast thy part,

Thy life for one light letter. . . . (ORESTES *looks at*
 PYLADES.) For thy friend,
 The law compelleth. He must bear the end
 By Artemis ordained, apart from thee.

ORESTES.

Strange woman, as thou biddest let it be,
 Save one thing. 'Twere for me a heavy weight
 Should this man die. 'Tis I and mine own fate
 That steer our goings. He but sails with me
 Because I suffer much. It must not be
 That by his ruin I should 'scape mine own,
 And win thy grace withal. 'Tis simply done.
 Give him the tablet. He with faithful will
 Shall all thy hest in Argolis fulfil.
 And I . . . who cares may kill me. Vile is he
 Who leaves a friend in peril and goes free
 Himself. And, as it chances, this is one
 Right dear to me; his life is as my own.

IPHIGENIA.

O royal heart! Surely from some great seed
 This branch is born, that can so love indeed.
 God grant the one yet living of my race
 Be such as thou! For not quite brotherless
 Am even I, save that I see him not,
 Strangers. . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be wrought.
 This man shall bear the message, and thou go
 To death. So greatly thou wilt have it so!

ORESTES.

Where is the priest who does this cruelty?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. This altar's spell is over me.

ORESTES.

A grievous office and unblest, O maid.

IPHIGENIA.

What dare I do? The law must be obeyed.

ORESTES.

A girl to hold a sword and stab men dead!

IPHIGENIA.

I shall but sign the water on thy head.

ORESTES.

And who shall strike me, if I needs must ask?

IPHIGENIA.

There be within these vaults who know their task.

ORESTES.

My grave, when they have finished their desire?

IPHIGENIA.

A great gulf of the rock, and holy fire.

ORESTES.

Woe's me!

Would that my sister's hand could close mine eyes!

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, she dwelleth under distant skies,
 Unhappy one, and vain is all thy prayer.
 Yet, Oh, thou art from Argos: all of care
 That can be, I will give and fail thee not.
 Rich raiment to thy burial shall be brought,
 And oil to cool thy pyre in golden floods,
 And sweet that from a thousand mountain buds
 The murmuring bee hath garnered, I will throw
 To die with thee in fragrance. . . .

I must go

And seek the tablet from the Goddess' room
 Within.—Oh, do not hate me for my doom!

Watch them, ye servitors, but leave them free.

It may be, past all hoping, it may be,
 My word shall sail to Argos, to his hand
 Whom most I love. How joyous will he stand
 To know, past hope, that here on the world's rim
 His dead are living, and cry out for him!

[She goes into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

Alas, we pity thee; surely we pity thee: *[Strophe.]*
 Who art given over to the holy water,
 The drops that fall deadly as drops of blood.

ORESTES.

I weep not, ye Greek maidens: but farewell.

CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe.*

Aye, and rejoice with thee; surely rejoice with thee,
Thou happy rover from the place of slaughter;
Thy foot shall stand again where thy father's
stood.

PYLADES.

While he I love must die? 'Tis miserable.

Divers Women of the CHORUS.

- A.* Alas, the deathward faring of the lost!
B. Woe, woe; thou too shalt move to misery.
C. Which one shall suffer most?
D. My heart is torn by two words evenly,
For thee should I most sorrow, or for thee?

ORESTES.

By heaven, is t h y thought, Pylades, like mine?

PYLADES.

O friend, I cannot speak.—But what is thine?

ORESTES.

Who can the damsel be? How Greek her tone
Of question, all of Ilion overthrown,
And how the kings came back, the wizard flame
Of Calchas, and Achilles' mighty name,

And ill-starred Agamemnon. With a keen
Pity she spoke, and asked me of his queen
And children. . . . The strange woman comes from
there .

By race, an Argive maid.—What aileth her
With tablets, else, and questionings as though
Her own heart beat with Argos' joy or woe?

PYLADES.

Thy speech is quicker, friend, else I had said
The same ; though surely all men visited
By ships have heard the fall of the great kings.
But let that be : I think of other things. . . .

ORESTES.

What? If thou hast need of me, let it be said.

PYLADES.

I cannot live for shame if thou art dead.
I sailed together with thee ; let us die
Together. What a coward slave were I,
Creeping through Argos and from glen to glen
Of wind-torn Phocian hills ! And most of men—
For most are bad—will whisper how one day
I left my friend to die and made my way
Home. They will say I watched the sinking breath
Of thy great house and plotted for thy death
To wed thy sister, climb into thy throne. . . .
I dread, I loathe it.—Nay, all ways but one
Are shut. My last breath shall go forth with thine,
Thy bloody sword, thy gulf of fire be mine
Also. I love thee and I dread men's scorn.

ORESTES.

Peace from such thoughts! My burden can be borne;
But where one pain sufficeth, double pain
I will not bear. Nay, all that scorn and stain
That fright thee, on mine own head worse would be
If I brought death on him who toiled for me.
It is no bitter thing for such an one
As God will have me be, at last to have done
With living. Thou art happy; thy house lies
At peace with God, unstained in men's eyes;
Mine is all evil fate and evil life. . . .
Nay, thou once safe, my sister for thy wife—
So we agreed—in sons of hers and thine
My name will live, nor Agamemnon's line
Be blurred for ever like an evil scroll.
Back! Rule thy land! Let life be in thy soul!
And when thou art come to Hellas, and the plain
Of Argos where the horsemen ride, again—
Give me thy hand!—I charge thee, let there be
Some death-mound and a graven stone for me.
My sister will go weep thereat, and shear
A tress or two. Say how I ended here,
Slain by a maid of Argolis, beside
God's altar, in mine own blood purified.

And fare thee well. I have no friend like thee
For truth and love, O boy that played with me,
And hunted on Greek hills, O thou on whom
Hath lain the hardest burden of my doom!
Farewell. The Prophet and the Lord of Lies
Hath done his worst. Far out from Grecian skies

vv. 713-730 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

With craft forethought he driveth me, to die
Where none may mark how ends his prophecy!
I trusted in his word. I gave him all
My heart. I slew my mother at his call;
For which things now he casts me here to die.

PYLADES.

Thy tomb shall fail thee not. Thy sister I
Will guard for ever. I, O stricken sore,
Who loved thee living and shall love thee more
Dead. But for all thou standest on the brink,
God's promise hath not yet destroyed thee. Think!
How oft, how oft the darkest hour of ill
Breaks brightest into dawn, if Fate but will!

ORESTES.

Enough. Nor god nor man can any more
Aid me. The woman standeth at the door.

Enter IPHIGENIA from the Temple.

IPHIGENIA.

Go ye within; and have all things of need
In order set for them that do the deed.
There wait my word. [ATTENDANTS *go in.*
Ye strangers, here I hold
The many-lettered tablet, fold on fold.
Yet . . . one thing still. No man, once unafraid
And safe, remembereth all the vows he made

In fear of death. My heart misgiveth me,
Lest he who bears my tablet, once gone free,
Forget me here and set my charge at naught.

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou, then? Thou hast some troubling
thought.

IPHIGENIA.

His sworn oath let him give, to bear this same
Tablet to Argos, to the friend I name.

ORESTES.

And if he give this oath, wilt thou swear too?

IPHIGENIA.

What should I swear to do or not to do?

ORESTES.

Send him from Tauris safe and free from ill.

IPHIGENIA.

I promise. How else could he do my will?

ORESTES.

The King will suffer this?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes: I can bend
The King, and set upon his ship thy friend.

vv. 743-751 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

ORESTES.

Choose then what oath is best, and he will swear.

IPHIGENIA (*to PYLADES, who has come up to her*).
Say: "To thy friend this tablet I will bear."

PYLADES (*taking the tablet*).

Good. I will bear this tablet to thy friend.

IPHIGENIA.

And I save thee beyond this kingdom's end.

PYLADES.

What god dost thou invoke to witness this?

IPHIGENIA.

Her in whose house I labour, Artemis.

PYLADES.

And I the Lord of Heaven, eternal Zeus.

IPHIGENIA.

And if thou fail me, or thine oath abuse. . . ?

PYLADES.

May I see home no more. And thou, what then?

IPHIGENIA.

May this foot never tread Greek earth again.

PYLADES.

But stay: there is one chance we have forgot.

IPHIGENIA.

A new oath can be sworn, if this serve not.

PYLADES.

In one case set me free. Say I be crossed
With shipwreck, and, with ship and tablet lost
And all I bear, my life be saved alone:
Let not this oath be held a thing undone,
To curse me.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, then, many ways are best
To many ends. The words thou carriest
Enrolled and hid beneath that tablet's rim,
I will repeat to thee, and thou to him
I look for. Safer so. If the scrip sail
Unhurt to Greece, itself will tell my tale
Unaided: if it drown in some wide sea,
Save but thyself, my words are saved with thee.

PYLADES.

For thy sake and for mine 'tis fairer so.
Now let me hear his name to whom I go
In Argolis, and how my words should run.

vv. 769-780 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

IPHIGENIA (*repeating the words by heart*). .

Say: "To Orestes, Agamemnon's son
She that was slain in Aulis, dead to Greece
Yet quick, Iphigenîa sendeth peace:"

ORESTES.

Iphigenîa! Where? Back from the dead?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. But speak not, lest thou break my thread.—
"Take me to Argos, brother, ere I die,
Back from the Friendless Peoples and the high
Altar of Her whose bloody rites I wreak."

ORESTES (*aside*).

Where am I, Pylades? How shall I speak?

IPHIGENIA.

"Else one in grief forsaken shall, like shame,
Haunt thee."

PYLADES (*aside*).

Orestes!

IPHIGENIA (*overhearing him*).

Yes: that is the name.

PYLADES.

Ye Gods above!

EURIPIDES

vv. 780-794

IPHIGENIA.

Why callest thou on God
For words of mine?

PYLADES.

'Tis nothing. 'Twas a road
My thoughts had turned. Speak on.—No need for us
To question; we shall hear things marvellous.

IPHIGENIA.

Tell him that Artemis my soul did save,
I wot not how, and to the altar gave
A fawn instead; the which my father slew,
Not seeing, deeming that the sword he drew
Struck me. But she had borne me far away
And left me in this land.—I charge thee, say
So much. It all is written on the scroll.

PYLADES.

An easy charge thou layest on my soul,
A glad oath on thine own. I wait no more,
But here fulfil the service that I swore.

Orestes, take this tablet which I bear
To thine own hand, thy sister's messenger.

ORESTES.

I take it, but I reckon not of its scrip
Nor message. Too much joy is at my lip.

vv. 795-807 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Sister! Belovèd! Wildered though I be,
My arms believe not, yet they crave for thee.
Now, filled with wonder, give me my delight!
[*He goes to embrace her. She stands speechless.*]

LEADER.

Stranger, forbear! No living man hath right
To touch that robe. The Goddess were defiled!

ORESTES.

O Sister mine, O my dead father's child,
Agamemnon's child; take me and have no fear,
Beyond all dreams 'tis I thy brother here.

IPHIGENIA.

My brother? Thou? . . . Peace! Mock at me no
more.
Argos is bright with him and Nauplia's shore.

ORESTES.

Unhappy one! Thou hast no brother there.

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes . . . thou? Whom Clytemnestra bare?

ORESTES.

To Atreus' firstborn son, thy sire and mine.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS vv. 808-817

IPHIGENIA.

Thou sayst it : Oh, give me some proof, some sign !

ORESTES.

What sign thou wilt. Ask anything from home.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, t h o u speak : 'tis from thee the sign should come.

ORESTES.

That will I.—First, old tales Electra told.
Thou knowest how Pelops' princes warred of old ?

IPHIGENIA.

I know : the Golden Lamb that wrought their doom.

ORESTES.

Thine own hand wove that story on the loom. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

How sweet ! Thou movest near old memories.

ORESTES.

With a great Sun back beaten in the skies.

IPHIGENIA.

Fine linen threads I used. The memories come.

ORESTES.

And mother gave thee shrift-water from home
For Aulis. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

I remember. Not so fair
A day did drink that water!

ORESTES.

And thine hair
They brought us for thy dying gift, and gave
To mother.

IPHIGENIA.

Yes: for record on the grave
I sent it, where this head should never lie.

ORESTES.

Another token, seen of mine own eye.
The ancient lance that leapt in Pelops' hand,
To win his bride, the virgin of the land,
And smite Oenomaus, in thy chamber hid. . . .

IPHIGENIA (*falling into his arms*).

Belovèd! Oh, no other, for indeed
Belovèd art thou! In mine arms at last,
Orestes far away.

ORESTES.

And thou in mine, the evil dreaming past,
 Back from the dead this day!
Yet through the joy tears, tears and sorrow loud
Are o'er mine eyes and thine eyes, like a cloud.

IPHIGENIA.

Is this the babe I knew,
The little babe, light lifted like a bird?
O heart of mine, too blest for any word,
 What shall I say or do?
Beyond all wonders, beyond stories heard,
 This joy is here and true.

ORESTES.

Could we but stay thus joined for evermore!

IPHIGENIA.

A joy is mine I may not understand,
Friends, and a fear, lest sudden from my hand
 This dream will melt and soar
Up to the fiery skies from whence it came.
O Argos land, O hearth and holy flame
 That old Cyclôpes lit,
I bless ye that he lives, that he is grown,
A light and strength, my brother and mine own;
 I bless your name for it.

ORESTES.

One blood we are; so much is well. But Fate,
Sister, hath not yet made us fortunate.

IPHIGENIA.

O most unfortunate! Did I not feel,
Whose father, misery-hearted, at my bare
Throat held the steel?

ORESTES.

Woe's me! Methinks even now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA.

No love-song of Achilles! Crafty arms
Drew me to that cold sleep,
And tears, blind tears amid the altar psalms
And noise of them that weep—
That was my cleansing!

ORESTES.

My heart too doth bleed,
To think our father wrought so dire a deed.

IPHIGENIA.

My life hath known no father. Any road
To any end may run,
As god's will drives; else . . .

ORESTES.

Else, unhappy one,
Thyself had spilt this day thy brother's blood!

IPHIGENIA.

Ah God, my cruel deed! . . . 'Twas horrible.
 'Twas horrible. . . . O brother! Did my heart
 Endure it? . . . And things fell
 Right by so frail a chance; and here thou art.
 Bloody my hand had been,
 My heart heavy with sin.
 And now, what end cometh?
 Shall Chance yet comfort me,
 Finding a way for thee
 Back from the Friendless Strand,
 Back from the place of death—
 Ere yet the slayers come
 And thy blood sink in the sand—
 Home unto Argos, home? . . .
 Hard heart, so swift to slay,
 Is there to life no way? . . .
 No ship! . . . And how by land? . . .
 A rush of feet
 Out to the waste alone.
 Nay: 'twere to meet
 Death, amid tribes unknown
 And trackless ways of the waste. . . .
 Surely the sea were best.
 Back by the narrow bar
 To the Dark Blue Gate! . . .
 Ah God, too far, too far! . . .
 Desolate! Desolate!
 What god or man, what unimagined flame,
 Can cleave this road where no road is, and bring
 To us last wrecks of Agamemnon's name,
 Peace from long suffering?

LEADER.

Lo, deeds of wonder and beyond surmise,
Not as tales told, but seen of mine own eyes.

PYLADES.

Men that have found the arms of those they love
Would fain long linger in the joy thereof.
But we, Orestes, have no respite yet
For tears or tenderness. Let us forget
All but the one word Freedom, calling us
To live, not die by altars barbarous.
Think not of joy in this great hour, nor lose
Fortune's first hold. Not thus do wise men use.

ORESTES.

I think that Fortune watcheth o'er our lives,
Surer than we. But well said: he who strives
Will find his gods strive for him equally.

IPHIGENIA.

He shall not check us so, nor baffle me
Of this one word. How doth Electra move
Through life? Ye twain are all I have to love.

ORESTES.

A wife and happy: this man hath her hand.

IPHIGENIA.

And what man's son is he, and of what land?

ORESTES.

Son of King Strophios he is called of men.

IPHIGENIA.

Whom Atreus' daughter wed?—My kinsman then.

ORESTES.

Our cousin, and my true and only friend.

IPHIGENIA.

He was not born, when I went to mine end.

ORESTES.

No, Strophios had no child for many a year.

IPHIGENIA.

I give thee hail, husband of one so dear.

ORESTES.

My more than kinsman, saviour in my need!

IPHIGENIA.

But mother. . . . Speak: how did ye dare that deed?

ORESTES.

Our father's wrongs. . . . But let that story be.

IPHIGENIA.

And she to slay her king! What cause had she?

ORESTES.

Forget her! . . . And no tale for thee it is.

IPHIGENIA.

So be it.—And thou art Lord of Argolis?

ORESTES.

Our uncle rules. I walk an exile's ways.

IPHIGENIA.

Doth he so trample on our fallen days?

ORESTES.

Nay: there be those that drive me, Shapes of Dread.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah!

That frenzy on the shore! 'Tis as they said. . . .

ORESTES.

They saw me in mine hour. It needs must be.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twas our dead mother's Furies hounding thee!

ORESTES.

My mouth is bloody with the curb they ride.

IPHIGENIA.

What brought thee here beyond the Friendless Tide?

ORESTES.

What leads me everywhere—Apollo's word.

IPHIGENIA.

Seeking what end?—Or may the tale be heard?

ORESTES.

Nay, I can tell thee all. It needs must be
The whole tale of my days of misery.

When this sore evil that we speak not of
Lit on my hand, this way and that they drove
My body, till the God by diverse paths
Led me to Athens, that the nameless Wraths
Might bring me before judgment. For that land
A pure tribunal hath, where Ares' hand,
Red from an ancient stain, by Zeus was sent
For justice. Thither came I; and there went
God's hate before me, that at first no man
Would give me shelter. Then some few began
To pity, and set out for me aloof
One table. There I sate within their roof,
But without word they signed to me, as one
Apart, unspoken to, unlooked upon,

Lest touch of me should stain their meat and sup.
 And every man in measure filled his cup
 And gave me mine, and took their joy apart,
 While I sat silent; for I had no heart
 To upbraid the hosts that fed me. On I wrought
 In my deep pain, feigning to mark them not.

And now, men say, mine evil days are made
 A rite among them and the cups are laid
 Apart for each. The rule abideth still.

Howbeit, when I was come to Ares' Hill
 They gave me judgment. On one stone I stood,
 On one she that was eldest of the brood
 That hunted me so long. And many a word
 Touching my mother's death was spoke and heard,
 Till Phoebus rose to save me. Even lay
 The votes of Death and Life; when, lo, a sway
 Of Pallas' arm, and free at last I stood
 From that death grapple. But the Shapes of Blood—
 Some did accept the judgment, and of grace
 Consent to make their house beneath that place
 In darkness. Others still consented not,
 But clove to me the more, like bloodhounds hot
 On the dying; till to Phoebus' house once more
 I crept, and cast me starving on the floor
 Facing the Holy Place, and made my cry:
 "Lord Phoebus, here I am come, and here will die,
 Unless thou save me, as thou hast betrayed."
 And, lo, from out that dark and golden shade
 A voice: "Go, seek the Taurian citadel:
 Seize there the carven Artemis that fell
 From heaven, and stablsh it on Attic soil.
 So comes thy freedom."

[IPHIGENIA *shrinks*.

Sister, in this toil

Help us!—If once that image I may win
That day shall end my madness and my sin:
And thou, to Argos o'er the sundering foam
My many-oarèd barque shall bear thee home.

O sister loved and lost, O pitying face,
Help my great peril; help our father's race.
For lost am I and perished all the powers
Of Pelops, save that heavenly thing be ours!

LEADER.

Strange wrath of God hath fallen, like hot rain,
On Tantalus' house: he leadeth them through pain.

IPHIGENIA.

Long ere you came my heart hath yearned to be
In Argos, brother, and so near to thee:
But now—thy will is mine. To ease thy pain,
To lift our father's house to peace again,
And hate no more my murderers—aye, 'tis good.
Perchance to clean this hand that sought thy blood,
And save my people . . .

But the goddess' eyes,
How dream we to deceive them? Or what wise
Escape the King, when on his sight shall fall
The blank stone of the empty pedestal? . . .
I needs must die. . . . What better can I do?

And yet, one chance there is: could I but go
Together with the image: couldst thou bear
Both on the leaping seas! The risk were fair.
But how?

Nay, I must wait then and be slain :
 Thou shalt walk free in Argolis again,
 And all life smile on thee. . . . Dearest, we need
 Nor shrink from that. I shall by mine own deed
 Have saved thee. And a man gone from the earth
 Is wept for. Women are but little worth.

ORESTES.

My mother and then thou? It may not be.
 This hand hath blood enough. I stand with thee
 One-hearted here, be it for life or death,
 And either bear thee, if God favoureth,
 With me to Greece and home, or else lie here
 Dead at thy side.—But mark me: if thou fear
 Lest Artemis be wroth, how can that be?
 Hath not her brother's self commanded me
 To bear to Greece her image?—Oh, he knew
 Her will! He knew that in this land we two
 Must meet once more. All that so far hath past
 Doth show his work. He will not at the last
 Fail. We shall yet see Argos, thou and I.

IPHIGENIA.

To stea¹ for thee the image, yet not die
 Myself! 'Tis that we need. 'Tis that doth kill
 My hope. Else. . . . Oh, God knows I have the will!

ORESTES.

How if we slew your savage king?

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, no:

He sheltered me, a stranger.

ORESTES.

Even so,

If it bring life for me and thee, the deed
May well be dared.

IPHIGENIA.

I could not. . . . Nay; indeed
I thank thee for thy daring.

ORESTES.

Canst thou hide

My body in the shrine?

IPHIGENIA.

There to abide

Till nightfall, and escape?

ORESTES.

Even so; the night

Is the safe time for robbers, as the light
For just men.

IPHIGENIA.

There be sacred watchers there
Who needs must see us.

ORESTES.

Gods above! What prayer
Can help us then?

IPHIGENIA.

I think I dimly see
One chance.

ORESTES.

What chance? Speak out thy fantasy.

IPHIGENIA.

On thine affliction I would build my way.

ORESTES.

Women have strange devices.

IPHIGENIA.

I would say
Thou com'st from Hellas with thy mother's blood
Upon thee.

ORESTES.

Use my shame, if any good
Will follow.

IPHIGENIA.

Therefore, an offence most high
It were to slay thee to the goddess!

ORESTES.

Why?

Though I half guess.

IPHIGENIA.

Thy body is unclean.—
Oh, I will fill them with the fear of sin!

ORESTES.

What help is that for the Image?

IPHIGENIA.

I will crave
To cleanse thee in the breaking of the wave.

ORESTES.

That leaves the goddess still inside her shrine,
And 'tis for her we sailed.

IPHIGENIA.

A touch of thine
Defiled her. She too must be purified.

ORESTES.

Where shall it be? Thou knowest where the tide
Sweeps up in a long channel?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes! And where
Your ship, I guess, lies moored.

ORESTES.

Whose hand will bear—
Should it be thine?—the image from her throne?

IPHIGENIA.

No hand of man may touch it save mine own.

ORESTES.

And Pylades—what part hath he herein?

IPHIGENIA.

The same as thine. He bears the self-same sin.

ORESTES.

How wilt thou work the plan—hid from the king
Or known?

IPHIGENIA.

To hide it were a hopeless thing. . . .
Oh, I will face him, make him yield to me.

ORESTES.

Well, fifty oars lie waiting on the sea.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, there comes t h y work, till an end be made.

ORESTES.

Good. It needs only that these women aid
Our secret. Do thou speak with them, and find
Words of persuasion. Power is in the mind
Of woman to wake pity.—For the rest,
God knoweth: may it all end for the best!

IPHIGENIA.

O women, you my comrades, in your eyes
I look to read my fate. In you it lies,
That either I find peace, or be cast down
To nothing, robbed for ever of mine own—
Brother, and home, and sister pricelessly
Beloved.—Are we not women, you and I,
A broken race, to one another true,
And strong in our shared secrets? Help me through
This strait; keep hid the secret of our flight,
And share our peril! Honour shineth bright
On her whose lips are steadfast. . . . Heaven above!
Three souls, but one in fortune, one in love,
Thou seest us go—is it to death or home?
If home, then surely, surely, there shall come

Part of our joy to thee. I swear, I swear
To aid thee also home. . . .

[*She goes to one after another, and presently
kneels embracing the knees of the LEADER.*

I make my prayer
By that right hand ; to thee, too, by that dear
Cheek ; by thy knees ; by all that is not here
Of things beloved, by mother, father, child—
Thou hadst a child !—How say ye? Have ye smiled
Or turned from me? For if ye turn away,
I and my brother are lost things this day.

LEADER.

Be of good heart, sweet mistress. Only go
To happiness. No child of man shall know
From us thy secret. Hear me, Zeus on high!

IPHIGENIA (*rising*).

God bless you for that word, and fill your eye
With light !— [Turning to ORESTES and PYLADES.

But now, to work ! Go thou, and thou,
In to the deeper shrine. King Thoas now
Should soon be here to question if the price
Be yet paid of the strangers' sacrifice.

[ORESTES and PYLADES go in.
Thou Holy One, that on the shrouded sand
Of Aulis saved me from a father's hand
Blood-maddened, save me now, and save these twain.
Else shall Apollo's lips, through thy disdain,
Be no more true nor trusted in men's eyes.
Come from the friendless shore, the cruel skies,

Come back: what mak'st thou here, when o'er the sea
A clean and joyous land doth call for thee?

[She follows the men into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

[Strophe 1.]

Bird of the sea rocks, of the bursting spray,
O halcyon bird,
That wheelest crying, crying, on thy way;
Who knoweth grief can read the tale of thee:
One love long lost, one song for ever heard
And wings that sweep the sea.

Sister, I too beside the sea complain,
A bird that hath no wing.
Oh, for a kind Greek market-place again,
For Artemis that healeth woman's pain;
Here I stand hungering.
Give me the little hill above the sea,
The palm of Delos fringed delicately,
The young sweet laurel and the olive-tree
Grey-leaved and glimmering;
O Isle of Leto, Isle of pain and love;
The Orbèd Water and the spell thereof;
Where still the Swan, minstrel of things to be,
Doth serve the Muse and sing!

[Antistrophe 1.]

Ah, the old tears, the old and blinding tears
I gave God then,
When my town fell, and noise was in mine ears
Of crashing towers, and forth they guided me
Through spears and lifted oars and angry men
Out to an unknown sea.

They bought my flesh with gold, and sore afraid
I came to this dark East

To serve, in thrall to Agamemnon's maid,
This Huntress Artemis, to whom is paid

The blood of no slain beast ;

Yet all is bloody where I dwell, Ah me !

Envyng, envying that misery

That through all life hath endured changelessly.

For hard things borne from birth

Make iron of man's heart, and hurt the less.

'Tis change that paineth ; and the bitterness

Of life's decay when joy hath ceased to be

That makes dark all the earth.

Behold,

[*Strophe 2.*

Two score and ten there be

Rowers that row for thee,

And a wild hill air, as if Pan were there,

Shall sound on the Argive sea,

Piping to set thee free.

Or is it the stricken string

Of Apollo's lyre doth sing

Joyously, as he guideth thee

To Athens, the land of spring ;

While I wait wearying?

Oh, the wind and the oar,

When the great sail swells before,

With sheets astrain, like a horse on the rein ;

And on, through the race and roar,

She feels for the farther shore.

Ah me, [*Antistrophe* 2.]

To rise upon wings and hold
 Straight on up the steeps of gold
 Where the joyous Sun in fire doth run,
 Till the wings should faint and fold
 O'er the house that was mine of old:

Or watch where the glade below
 With a marriage dance doth glow,
 And a child will glide from her mother's side
 Out, out, where the dancers flow:
 As I did, long ago.

Oh, battles of gold and rare
 Raiment and starrèd hair,
 And bright veils crossed amid tresses tossed
 In a dusk of dancing air!
 O Youth and the days that were!

Enter KING THOAS, *with Soldiers.*

THOAS.

Where is the warden of this sacred gate,
 The Greek woman? Is her work ended yet
 With those two strangers? Do their bodies lie
 Aflame now in the rock-cleft sanctuary?

LEADER.

Here is herself, O King, to give thee word.

vv. 1157-1164 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

*Enter, from the Temple, IPHIGENIA, carrying
the Image on high.*

THOAS.

How, child of Agamemnon! Hast thou stirred
From her eternal base, and to the sun
Bearest in thine own arms, the Holy One?

IPHIGENIA.

Back Lord! No step beyond the pillared way.

THOAS.

But how? Some rule is broken?

IPHIGENIA.

I unsay
That word. Be all unspoken and unwrought!

THOAS.

What means this greeting strange? Disclose thy
thought.

IPHIGENIA.

Unclean the prey was that ye caught, O King.

THOAS.

Who showed thee so? Thine own imagining?

IPHIGENIA.

The Image stirred and shuddered from its seat.

THOAS.

Itself? . . . Some shock of earthquake loosened it.

IPHIGENIA.

Itself. And the eyes closed one breathing space.

THOAS.

But why? For those two men's bloodguiltiness?

IPHIGENIA.

That, nothing else. For, Oh, their guilt is sore.

THOAS.

They killed some of my herdsmen on the shore?

IPHIGENIA.

Their sin was brought from home, not gathered here.

THOAS.

What? I must know this.—Make thy story clear.

IPHIGENIA. (*She puts the Image down and moves
nearer to THOAS.*)

The men have slain their mother.

vv. 1174-1182 IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

THOAS.

God! And these
Be Greeks!

IPHIGENIA.

They both are hunted out of Greece.

THOAS.

For this thou has brought the Image to the sun?

IPHIGENIA.

The fire of heaven can cleanse all malison.

THOAS.

How didst thou first hear of their deed of shame?

IPHIGENIA.

When the Image hid its eyes, I questioned them.

THOAS.

Good. Greece hath taught thee many a subtle art.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, they too had sweet words to move my heart.

THOAS.

Sweet words? How, did they bring some news of
Greece?

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes, my one brother, lives in peace.

THOAS.

Surely! Good news to make thee spare their lives. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

My father too in Argos lives and thrives.

THOAS.

While thou didst think but of the goddess' laws!

IPHIGENIA.

Do I not hate all Greeks? Have I not cause?

THOAS.

Good cause. But now. . . . What service should be
paid?

IPHIGENIA.

The Law of long years needs must be obeyed.

THOAS.

To work then, with thy sword and handwashing!

IPHIGENIA.

First I must shrive them with some cleansing thing.

THOAS.

What? Running water, or the sea's salt spray?

IPHIGENIA.

The sea doth wash all the world's ills away.

THOAS.

For sure. 'Twill make them cleaner for the knife.

IPHIGENIA.

And my hand, too, cleaner for all my life.

THOAS.

Well, the waves lap close by the temple floor.

IPHIGENIA.

We need a secret place. I must do more.

THOAS.

Some rite unseen? 'Tis well. Go where thou wilt.

IPHIGENIA.

The Image likewise must be purged of guilt.

THOAS.

The stain hath touched it of that mother's blood?

IPHIGENIA.

I durst not move it else, from where it stood.

THOAS.

How good thy godliness and forethought! Aye,
Small wonder all our people holds thee high.

IPHIGENIA.

Dost know then what I fain would have?

THOAS.

'Tis thine to speak and it shall be.

IPHIGENIA.

Put bondage on the strangers both. . . .

THOAS.

Why bondage? Whither can they flee?

IPHIGENIA.

Put not thy faith in any Greek.

THOAS (*to ATTENDANTS*).

Ho, men! Some thongs and fetters, go!

IPHIGENIA.

Stay; let them lead the strangers here, outside the
shrine. . . .

THOAS.

It shall be so.

IPHIGENIA.

And lay dark raiment on their heads. . . .

THOAS.

To veil them, lest the Sun should see.

IPHIGENIA.

And lend me some of thine own spears.

THOAS.

This company shall go with thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Next, send through all the city streets a herald. . . .

THOAS.

Aye; and what to say?

IPHIGENIA.

That no man living stir abroad.

THOAS.

The stain of blood might cross their way.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, sin like theirs doth spread contagion.

THOAS (*to an ATTENDANT*).

Forth, and publish my command. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

That none stir forth—nor look. . . .

THOAS.

Nor look.—How well thou carest for the land!

IPHIGENIA.

For one whom I am bound to love.

THOAS.

Indeed, I think thou hat'st me not.

IPHIGENIA.

And thou meanwhile, here at the temple, wait, O King,
and . . .

THOAS.

Wait for what?

IPHIGENIA.

Purge all the shrine with fire.

THOAS.

'Twill all be clean before you come again.

IPHIGENIA.

And while the strangers pass thee close, seeking the
sea. . . .

THOAS.

What wouldst thou then?

IPHIGENIA.

Put darkness on thine eyes.

THOAS.

Mine eyes might drink the evil of their crime?

IPHIGENIA.

And, should I seem to stay too long. . . .

THOAS.

Too long? How shall I judge the time?

IPHIGENIA.

Be not dismayed.

THOAS.

Perform thy rite all duly. We have time to spare.

IPHIGENIA.

And God but grant this cleansing end as I desire!

THOAS.

I join thy prayer.

IPHIGENIA.

The door doth open! See, they lead the strangers from
the cell within,

And raiment holy and young lambs, whose blood shall
shrive the blood of Sin.

And, lo, the light of sacred fires, and things of secret
power, arrayed

By mine own hand to cleanse aright the strangers, to
cleanse Leto's Maid.

[She takes up the Image again.]

There passeth here a holy thing: begone, I charge ye,
from the road,

O whoso by these sacred gates may dwell, hand-conse-
crate to God,

What man hath marriage in his heart, what woman
goeth great with child,

Begone and tremble from this road: fly swiftly, lest ye
be defiled.—

O Queen and Virgin, Leto-born, have pity! Let me
 cleanse this stain,
 And pray to thee where pray I would: a clean house
 shall be thine again,
 And we at last win happiness.—Behold, I speak but as
 I dare;
 The rest. . . . Oh, God is wise, and thou, my Mistress,
 thou canst read my prayer.

[The procession passes out, THOAS and the by-standers veiled; Attendants in front, then IPHIGENIA with the Image, then veiled Soldiers, then ORESTES and PYLADES bound, the bonds held by other veiled Soldiers following them. THOAS goes into the Temple.]

CHORUS.

[Strophe.]

Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow:
 A Virgin, one, with joyous bow,
 And one a Lord of flashing locks,
 Wise in the harp, Apollo:
 She bore them amid Delian rocks,
 Hid in a fruited hollow.

But forth she fared from that low reef,
 Sea-cradle of her joy and grief.
 A crag she knew more near the skies
 And lit with wilder water,
 That leaps with joy of Dionyse:
 There brought she son and daughter.

And there, behold, an ancient Snake,
Wine-eyed, bronze-gleaming in the brake
Of deep-leaved laurel, ruled the dell,
Sent by old Earth from under
Strange caves to guard her oracle—
A thing of fear and wonder.

Thou, Phoebus, still a new-born thing,
Meet in thy mother's arms to lie,
Didst kill the Snake and crown thee king,
In Pytho's land of prophecy:
Thine was the tripod and the chair
Of golden truth; and thronèd there,
Hard by the streams of Castaly,
Beneath the untrodden portal
Of Earth's mid stone there flows from thee
Wisdom for all things mortal.

[*Antistrophe.*

He slew the Snake; he cast, men say,
Themis, the child of Earth, away
From Pytho and her hallowed stream;
Then Earth, in dark derision,
Brought forth the Peoples of the Dream
And all the tribes of Vision.

And men besought them; and from deep
Confused underworlds of sleep
They showed blind things that erst had been
And are and yet shall follow
So did avenge that old Earth Queen
Her child's wrong on Apollo.

Then swiftly flew that conquering one
 To Zeus on high, and round the throne
 Twining a small indignant hand,
 Prayed him to send redeeming
 To Pytho from that troublous band
 Sprung from the darks of dreaming.

Zeus laughed to see the babe, I trow,
 So swift to claim his golden rite ;
 He laughed and bowed his head, in vow
 To still those voices of the night.
 And so from out the eyes of men
 That dark dream-truth was lost again ;
 And Phoebus, thronèd where the throng
 Prays at the golden portal,
 Again doth shed in sunlit song
 Hope unto all things mortal.

Enter a MESSENGER, running.

MESSENGER.

Ho, watchers of the fane ! Ho, altar-guard,
 Where is King Thoas gone ? Undo the barred
 Portals, and call the King ! The King I seek.

LEADER.

What tidings—if unbidden I may speak ?

MESSENGER.

The strangers both are gone, and we beguiled,
 By some dark plot of Agamemnon's child :

Fled from the land! And on a barque of Greece
They bear the heaven-sent shape of Artemis.

LEADER.

Thy tale is past belief.—Go, swiftly on,
And find the King. He is but newly gone.

MESSENGER.

Where went he? He must know of what has passed!

LEADER.

I know not where he went. But follow fast
And seek him. Thou wilt light on him ere long.

MESSENGER.

✓ See there! The treason of a woman's tongue!
Ye all are in the plot, I warrant ye!

LEADER.

Thy words are mad! What are the men to me? . . .
Go to the palace, go!

MESSENGER (*seeing the great knocker on the
Temple door.*)

I will not stir

Till word be come by this good messenger
If Thoas be within these gates or no.—

[*Thundering at the door.*]

Ho, loose the portals! Ye within! What ho!
Open, and tell our master one doth stand
Without here, with strange evil in his hand.

Enter THOAS from the Temple.

THOAS.

Who dares before this portal consecrate
Make uproar and lewd battering of the gate?
Thy noise hath broke the Altar's ancient peace.

MESSENGER.

Ye Gods! They swore to me—and bade me cease
My search—the King was gone. And all the
while. . . !

THOAS.

These women? How? What sought they by such
guile?

MESSENGER.

Of them hereafter!—Give me first thine ear
For greater things. The virgin minister
That served our altar, she hath fled from this
And stolen the dread Shape of Artemis,
With those two Greeks. The cleansing was a lie.

THOAS.

She fled?—What wild hope whispered her to fly?

MESSENGER.

The hope to save Orestes. Wonder on!

THOAS.

Orestes—how? Not Clytemnestra's son?

MESSENGER.

And our pledged altar-offering. 'Tis the same.

THOAS.

O marvel beyond marvel! By what name
More rich in wonder can I name thee right?

MESSENGER.

Give not thy mind to that. Let ear and sight
Be mine awhile; and when thou hast heard the whole
Devise how best to trap them ere the goal.

THOAS.

Aye, tell thy tale. Our Tauric seas stretch far,
Where no man may escape my wand of war.

MESSENGER.

Soon as we reached that headland of the sea,
Whereby Orestes' barque lay secretly,
We soldiers holding, by thine own commands,
The chain that bound the strangers, in our hands,

There Agamemnon's daughter made a sign,
 Bidding us wait far off, for some divine
 And secret fire of cleansing she must make.
 We could but do her will. We saw her take
 The chain in her own hands and walk behind.
 Indeed thy servants bore a troubled mind,
 O King, but how do else? So time went by.
 Meanwhile to make it seem she wrought some high
 Magic, she cried aloud: then came the long
 Drone of some strange and necromantic song,
 As though she toiled to cleanse that blood; and there
 Sat we, that long time, waiting. Till a fear
 O'ertook us, that the men might slip their chain
 And strike the priestess down and plunge amain
 For safety: yet the dread our eyes to fill
 With sights unbidden held us, and we still
 Sat silent. But at last all spoke as one,
 Forbid or not forbid, to hasten on
 And find them. On we went, and suddenly,
 With oarage poised, like wings upon the sea,
 An Argive ship we saw, her fifty men
 All benched, and on the shore, with every chain
 Cast off, our strangers, standing by the stern!
 The prow was held by stay-poles: turn by turn
 The anchor-cable rose; some men had strung
 Long ropes into a ladder, which they swung
 Over the side for those two Greeks to climb.

The plot was open, and we lost no time
 But flew to seize the cables and the maid,
 And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade,
 To spoil her course, and shouted: "Ho, what way
 Is this, to sail the seas and steal away

An holy image and its minister?

What man art thou, and what man's son, to bear
Our priestess from the land?" And clear thereon
He spoke: "Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
And brother to this maid, whom here in peace
I bear, my long lost sister, back to Greece."

We none the less clung fast to her, and strove
To drag her to thy judgment-seat. Thereof
Came trouble and bruised jaws. For neither they
Nor we had weapons with us. But the way
Hard-beaten fist and heel from those two men
Rained upon ribs and flank—again, again . . .
To touch was to fall gasping! Aye, they laid
Their mark on all of us, till back we fled
With bleeding crowns, and some with blinded eyes,
Up a rough bank of rock. There on the rise
We found good stones and stood, and fought again.

But archers then came out, and sent a rain
Of arrows from the poop, and drove us back.
And just then—for a wave came, long and black,
And swept them shoreward—lest the priestess' gown
Should feel the sea, Orestes stooping down
Caught her on his left shoulder: then one stride
Out through the sea, the ladder at the side
Was caught, and there amid the benches stood
The maid of Argos and the carven wood
Of heaven, the image of God's daughter high.

And up from the mid galley rose a cry:
"For Greece! For Greece, O children of the shores
Of storm! Give way, and let her feel your oars;
Churn the long waves to foam. The prize is won,
The prize we followed, on and ever on,
Friendless beyond the blue Symplêgades."

A roar of glad throats echoed down the breeze
 And fifty oars struck, and away she flew.
 And while the shelter lasted, she ran true
 Full for the harbour-mouth ; but ere she well
 Reached it, the weather caught her, and the swell
 Was strong. Then sudden in her teeth a squall
 Drove the sail bellying back. The men withal
 Worked with set teeth, kicking against the stream.
 But back, still back, striving as in a dream,
 She drifted. Then the damsel rose and prayed :
 "O Child of Leto, save thy chosen maid
 From this dark land to Hellas, and forgive
 My theft this day, and let these brave men live.
 Dost thou not love thy brother, Holy One?
 What marvel if I also love mine own?"

The sailors cried a paeon to her prayers,
 And set those brown and naked arms of theirs,
 Half-mad with strain, quick swinging chime on chime
 To the helmsman's shout. But vainly ; all the time
 Nearer and nearer rockward they were pressed.
 One of our men was wading to his breast,
 Some others roping a great grappling-hook,
 While I sped hot-foot to the town, to look
 For thee, my Prince, and tell thee what doth pass.

Come with me, Lord. Bring manacles of brass
 And bitter bonds. For now, unless the wave
 Fall sudden calm, no mortal power can save
 Orestes. There is One that rules the sea
 Who grieved for Troy and hates her enemy :
 Poseidon's self will give into thine hand
 And ours this dog, this troubler of the land—
 The priestess, too, who, recking not what blood
 Ran red in Aulis, hath betrayed her god !

LEADER.

Woe, woe! To fall in these men's hands again,
Mistress, and die, and see thy brother slain!

THOAS.

Ho, all ye dwellers of my savage town
Set saddle on your steeds, and gallop down
To watch the heads, and gather what is cast
Alive from this Greek wreck. We shall make fast,
By God's help, the blasphemers.—Send a corps
Out in good boats a furlong from the shore;
So we shall either snare them on the seas
Or ride them down by land, and at our ease
Fling them down gulfs of rock, or pale them high
On stakes in the sun, to feed our birds and die.

Women: you knew this plot. Each one of you
Shall know, before the work I have to do
Is done, what torment is.—Enough. A clear
Task is afoot. I must not linger here.

*[While THOAS is moving off, his men shouting
and running before and behind him, there
comes a sudden blasting light and thunder-
roll, and ATHENA is seen in the air con-
fronting them.]*

ATHENA.

Ho, whither now, so hot upon the prey,
King Thoas? It is I that bid thee stay,
Athena, child of Zeus. Turn back this flood
Of wrathful men, and get thee temperate blood.

Apollo's word and Fate's ordained path
Have led Orestes here, to escape the wrath

Of Them that Hate. To Argos he must bring
His sister's life, and guide that Holy Thing
Which fell from heaven, in mine own land to dwell.
So shall his pain have rest, and all be well.
Thou hast heard my speech, O King. No death from
thee

May snare Orestes between rocks and sea :
Poseidon for my love doth make the sore
Waves gentle, and set free his labouring oar.

And thou, O far away—for, far or near
A goddess speaketh and thy heart must hear—
Go on thy ways, Orestes, bearing home
The Image and thy sister. When ye come
To god-built Athens, lo, a land there is
Half hid on Attica's last boundaries,
A little land, hard by Karystus' Rock,
But sacred. It is called by Attic folk
Halae. Build there a temple, and bestow
Therein thine Image, that the world may know
The tale of Tauris and of thee, cast out
From pole to pole of Greece, a blood-hound rout
Of ill thoughts driving thee. So through the whole
Of time to Artemis the Tauropole
Shall men make hymns at Halae. And withal
Give them this law. At each high festival,
A sword, in record of thy death undone,
Shall touch a man's throat, and the red blood run—
One drop, for old religion's sake. In this
Shall live that old red rite of Artemis.

And thou, Iphigenia, by the stair
Of Brauron in the rocks, the Key shalt bear
Of Artemis. There shalt thou live and die,
And there have burial. And a gift shall lie
Above thy shrine, fair raiment undefiled
Left upon earth by mothers dead with child.

Ye last, O exiled women, true of heart
And faithful found, ye shall in peace depart,
Each to her home: behold Athena's will.

Orestes, long ago on Ares' Hill
I saved thee, when the votes of Death and Life
Lay equal: and henceforth, when men at strife
So stand, mid equal votes of Life and Death,
My law shall hold that Mercy conquereth.
Begone. Lead forth thy sister from this shore
In peace; and thou, Thoas, be wroth no more.

THOAS.

Most high Athena, he who bows not low
His head to God's word spoken, I scarce know
How such an one doth live. Orestes hath
Fled with mine Image hence. . . . I bear no wrath.
Nor yet against his sister. There is naught,
Methinks, of honour in a battle fought
'Gainst gods. The strength is theirs. Let those two
fare
Forth to thy land and plant mine Image there.
I wish them well.

These bondwomen no less
I will send free to Greece and happiness,

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And stay my galleys' oars, and bid this brand
Be sheathed again, Goddess, at thy command.

ATHENA.

'Tis well, O King. For that which needs must be
Holdeth the high gods as it holdeth thee.

Winds of the north, O winds that laugh and run,
Bear now to Athens Agamemnon's son:
Myself am with you, o'er long leagues of foam
Guiding my sister's hallowed Image home.
[*She floats away.*]

CHORUS.

Some Women.

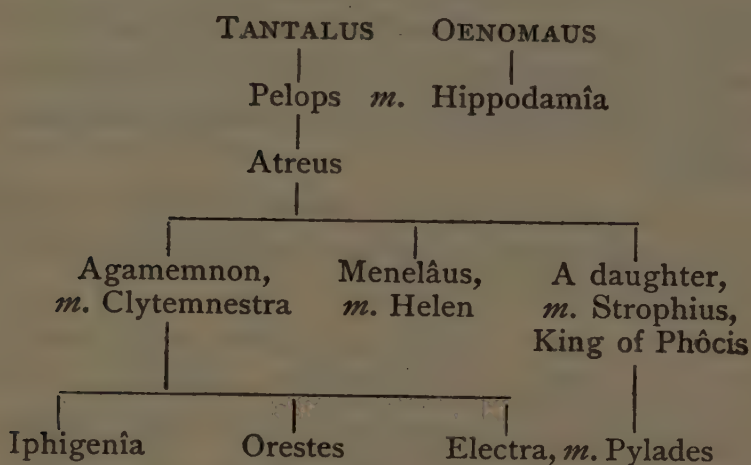
Go forth in bliss, O ye whose lot
God shieldeth, that ye perish not!

Others.

O great in our dull world of clay,
And great in heaven's undying gleam,
Pallas, thy bidding we obey:
And bless thee, for mine ears have heard
The joy and wonder of a word
Beyond my dream, beyond my dream.

NOTES TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY



(The names "Iphigenîa," "Hippodamîa" have the last *i* long, as in "Obadiah"; similarly, "Menelaus" rhymes with "slay us." But Oenomaus and Strophius have the penultimate short.)

P. 3, l. 1.]—Oenomaüs, King of Elis, offered his daughter and his kingdom to any man who should beat him in a chariot race; those who failed he slew. Pelops challenged him and won the race through a trick of his servant, Myrtilus, who treacherously took the linchpins out of Oenomaüs's chariot. Oenomaüs was thrown out and killed; Pelops took the kingdom, but in remorse or indignation threw Myrtilus into the

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sea (l. 192, p. 11). In some stories Oenomaüs killed the suitors by spearing them from behind when they passed him. Pelops was the son of Tantalus, renowned for his pride and its punishment.

P. 3, l. 8, For Helen's sake.]—*i.e.* in order to win Helen back from the Trojans.

P. 4, l. 23, Whatever birth most fair.]—Artemis Kalliste ("Most Fair") was apparently so called because, after a competition for beauty, that which won the prize (τό καλλιστεῖον) was selected and given to her. This rite is made by the story to lead to a sacrifice of the fairest maiden, and may very possibly have sometimes done so.

P. 4, l. 42.]—She tells her dream to the sky to get it off her mind, much as the Nurse does in the *Medea* (p. 5, l. 57).

P. 5, l. 50, One . . . pillar.]—It is worth remembering that a pillar was among the earliest objects of worship in Crete and elsewhere. Cf. "the pillared sanctities" (l. 128, p. 9) and the "blood on the pillars" (l. 405, p. 20).

P. 8, l. 113, A hollow one might creep through.]—The metopes, or gaps between the beams. The Temple was therefore of a primitive Dorian type.

P. 8, ll. 124–125.]—The land of Tauris is conceived as being beyond the Symplêgades, or, as here, as being the country of the Symplêgades.

As these semi-mythical names settled down in history, Tauris became the Crimea, the Symplêgades, or "Clashing Rocks," or "Dark-Blue Rocks," became two rocks at the upper end of the Bosphorus, and the Friendless or Strangerless Sea became the Euxine. The

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word *Axeinos*, "Friendless," has often been altered in the MSS. of this play to *Euxeinos*, "Hospitable," which was the ordinary prose name of the Black Sea in historical times.

P. 9, l. 133, The horses and the towers.]—The steppes of the Taurians would have no gardens or city walls, but it is curious that Hellas should seem specially a land of horses by comparison. Cf. p. 86, l. 1423, where Thoas has horses.

P. 10, l. 168, The golden goblet, &c.]—She evidently takes jars of libation from the Attendants and pours them during the next few lines into some *Eschara*, or Altar for the Dead. Most of the rite would probably be performed kneeling.

P. 11, ll. 192 ff., The dark and wheeling coursers.]—*i.e.* those of Pelops. The cry of one betrayed: Myrtilus, when he was thrown into the sea. (See on l. 1.) For the Golden Lamb and the Sun turning in Heaven, see my translation of *Electra*, p. 47, l. 699 and note.

P. 12, l. 217, The Nereid's Son.]—Achilles, son of Peleus and the Nereid Thetis.

P. 13, l. 238, The Herdsman's entrance.]—Observe how Iphigenia is first merely disturbed in her obsequies: then comes the sickening news that there are strangers to sacrifice: then lastly, her worst fear is realised; the men are Greeks. This explains her exasperated tone in l. 254, "The sea! What is the sea . . ." and "Go back!"—The Herdsman is merely jubilant and obtuse.

P. 15, l. 263.]—The murex or purple-fish could only be collected in very late autumn or early spring; consequently the fishers made encampments for the

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winter and returned to Tyre and Sidon, or wherever else they came from, after the spring fishing. See Bérard, *Phéniciens et Odyssée*, i. 415.

P. 15, l. 270, Son of the White Sea Spirit, &c.]—The man is, of course, made to use the names of Greek not of Taurian gods. He thinks first of Palaemon, a sea-god, son of Leucothea ("White-Goddess"), then of the Dioskori, Castor and Polydeuces; then vaguely of some spirits beloved of Nereus, the Ancient of the Sea.

P. 17, l. 328 f., Of all those shots not one struck home.]—The object of this statement must be to explain why the two heroes do not make their appearance bruised and dishevelled as the Second Messenger does after his fight with the Greeks. Of course there is no great harm in making the Taurians bad shots as well as cowards, and possibly there is some value in the suggestion of a supernatural protection which is only saving its object for a crueller death. But very likely the two lines are interpolations.

Pp. 17, 18, ll. 342 ff.]—A wonderful speech, illustrating the gradual breaking-up of the ice in Iphigenia's nature.—The Herdsman's story has, of course, been horrible to her; all the more so because he expects her to enjoy it and recalls wild words she has uttered in the past, when brooding on her wrongs. She controls her feelings absolutely till the man is gone. Then she feels like one turned to stone, pitiless; then, if only it were Helen or Menelaus that she had to kill! Then vivid thoughts of the misery and horror of Aulis and the poor foolish hopes and tremors in which she had come there; then the thought that Orestes, the one man whom she could love without resentment, is dead. Then a

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rage of indignation against the bloody rites and the infamy of the thing she has to do. She goes into the Temple broken in nerve and almost ready for rebellion.

P. 19, ll. 385 ff.]—Lêtô, beloved of Zeus, was the mother of Artemis and Apollo, who were born in the holy island of Dêlos.—One legend, already rejected by Pindar, said that the crime of Tantalus was that he had given his child Pelops to the gods to eat.

P. 19, l. 392, Dark of the sea.]—The Dark-Blue of the Symplêgades is meant. Sometimes it is only the *Argo* that has ever passed through them; here it is only Io, daughter of Inachus, loved by Zeus and hunted by the gadfly, who fled outcast through the East. Her story is told in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and in a magnificent chorus of his *Suppliant Women*. (See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, Penultimate Chapter.)

The present lyric begins by wondering how and why the strangers have come: then come thoughts of the voyage and places they must have passed; the coast, where Phineus was haunted by the Harpies, the enchanted sea beyond the Symplêgades, and the mysterious Isle of Leuce ("White") where Achilles lives after death.—Then comes a thought of Iphigenia's longing for revenge on Helen: but revenge is no use. It is home they crave, or, if that is impossible, then sleep and dreams of home.

P. 21, l. 431, The steering oar abaft;]—The steering was done by an oar, or sometimes two oars, projecting into the sea from a hole in the stern. Cf. l. 1356, p. 83, "And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade." If this oar was left free, it would ripple and beat against the side.

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P. 23, l. 472, What mother then was yours, &c.]—Not very like a woman “turned to stone” or “without a tear.” She had miscalculated her own feelings.—Observe how Orestes sternly rejects her sentimental sympathy. He needs all his strength.

P. 25, l. 512, A kind of banishment.]—He was driven by his Furies, not legally banished.

Pp. 26, 27, ll. 515 and 529, “Oh how sweet to see thee here!” and “Oh, give me this hour full. Thou wilt soon die.”]—Iphigenia is more than tactless. She is so starving for home or anything that brings her into touch with home, that neither this Stranger’s death nor anything else matters to her in comparison. A fine dramatic stroke.

The people of whom she asks are, first, her enemies—Helen; Calchas, the prophet, who had commanded her sacrifice; Odysseus, who had devised the plot by which she was brought to Aulis (ll. 16, 24); then Achilles, who had been the hero of her dreams; then, with fear and hesitancy, those for whom she cares most.—Observe, at l. 553, how, on hearing of her father’s murder, her first thought is pity for her mother. Her father is already in her mind “he that slew.” But in every line of this dialogue there is fine drama and psychology.

P. 28, l. 538, “Small help his bridal brought him; he is dead.”]—It has been thought curious that the mention of Achilles should immediately suggest to Orestes the bridal at Aulis, though of course it does so to Iphigenia. But after all it was Orestes’ sister that Achilles was to marry at Aulis; and secondly, a large part of Orestes’ troubles came from the carrying off

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of his betrothed, Hermione, by Achilles' bastard son, Pyrrhus. If the marriage at Aulis had taken place and Achilles left a true-born son, that would all have been different.

P. 31, l. 569, Light dreams farewell! Ye too were lies.]—This does seem a wrong conclusion. The dreams only suggested that Orestes had died the day before, long after this man had left Argos. But perhaps it is not unnatural.

P. 32, ll. 576 f., We too have kinsmen dear.]—A most characteristic Euripidean saying. It also leads up to the personal interest in the Chorus which we feel after l. 1075, p. 63, when they are taken into the conspiracy and then abandoned.

P. 32, l. 578, Listen; for I am fallen upon a thought.]—It must not be supposed that this use of the tablet is an obvious or easy thing. It is a daring project that crosses her mind, as one possible way of avoiding the death of this Stranger. Her hesitation at l. 742—where a pause is indicated in the Greek—shows that she is only trusting to her special influence over the King to get him to relax the law. Presumably merchants sometimes were admitted to the Tauri; for instance, those who brought the Chorus. The safe way to use the tablet would have been to make sure of the friendship of one of these. But such questions lie outside the play.

P. 34, l. 618, This altar's spell is over me.]—I translate the MS. reading $\tau\tilde{\eta}\sigma\delta\epsilon$. In my text I accepted the usual emendation $\tau\tilde{\eta}\nu\delta\epsilon$. But $\mu\pi\sigma\sigma\tau\rho\sigma\pi\acute{\eta}$ means "spell" or "infection." See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, p. 86.

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P. 34, l. 627, My sister's hand.]—*i.e.* Electra's.

Pp. 35-39, ll. 645-724.]—Observe that all through this scene it is Pylades who is broken and Orestes strong. Contrast their first entrance, pp. 6-8.

P. 45, l. 804, Argos is bright with him.]—Literally, "is full of him." I am not sure that I understand the expression, but I think she feels Orestes as a magnificent presence filling all his home.

P. 46, ll. 809 ff.]—The "signs" are clear enough. He remembers that there was an embroidery of the Golden Lamb story worked by Iphigenia; that when she started for Aulis she had cut off her hair for her mother and her mother had given her some Inachus water to use in the sacred washing before her marriage; also, there was an old spear belonging to Pelops in Iphigenia's room.—Apparently Pelops carried a spear in the chariot race, just as Oenomaus did.

Pp. 47-50, ll. 827-900.]—In this scene Iphigenia simply abandons herself to one emotion after another, while Orestes, amid all his joy, keeps his head and thinks about the danger that still surrounds them. When he reminds her that they are "not yet fortunate," she thinks only of Aulis and her old wrong. At last Orestes gets in the word, "Suppose you had murdered me to-day," and she is recalled by a rush of horror at her own conduct: she has nearly killed him, and he is still in imminent danger. She tries passionately and despairingly to think of ways of escape, but it needs the intervention of Pylades (which she rather resents) to bring her into a mood for sober thinking.

P. 51, l. 915, A wife and happy.]—The last we heard of Electra was that she lived "unmated and

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alone" (l. 562, p. 31). But that was said when Pylades was regarded as practically a dead man. Electra was apparently betrothed to Pylades, but was not actually his wife.—There is no mention of the Peasant husband of the *Electra*.

P. 52, l. 818.]—Anaxibia (?), sister of Agamemnon, was wife to Strophios. See genealogical table.

P. 53, ll. 930 ff., That frenzy on the shore!—It is only now that Iphigenia fully realises her brother's madness. His narrative immediately following makes her feel it the more, and it is evidently in her mind while she speaks ll. 989 ff.

P. 54 f., ll. 940 ff., Orestes' Trial at Athens.]—According to one legend Orestes was finally purified of his guilt by a trial at the Areopagus, in which Apollo championed him, and Athena, as President, gave a casting vote for mercy. (This is the story of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.) By another, he was healed when he had brought this Image of Artemis to Attica. Euripides combines the two.—It must often have happened in a blood-feud that some of the kindred of the slain man would accept the result of a trial and obey the law, while some cared for no law but clung to their vengeance. Euripides makes the Furies do the same. Some accept the judgment and stay as "Eumenides" in Athens; others know no law nor mercy.

P. 55, ll. 949–960, Mine evil days are made a rite among them.]—At the Feast of the Anthesteria, each family summoned its ghosts from the grave and after the feast sent them back again. While they were about, it was very important that each man should keep his ghosts to himself: there must be no infection of strange

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or baleful ghosts. Hence a rite in which each man ate and drank his own portion, holding no communication with his neighbour. The story then went that this was done in commemoration of Orestes' visit to Athens with the stain of blood upon him. (See Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena*, chap. ii.) There was a similar feast in Aegina.

P. 56, ll. 990–1006.]—Iphigenia's speech. We must realise that Iphigenia has been suddenly confronted by a new and complicated difficulty. She was prepared to make some plot to save her brother's life. She now realises that he is on the verge of madness; that he is determined to commit an act of what will be considered desperate sacrilege by stealing the image of Artemis; and that he expects her to help him to get the image to his ship.—She might hope to send him away safe and be forgiven by the King: if she helps him to steal the image, she cannot possibly be forgiven. Again, she might very possibly fly with him secretly, if she went alone; but to steal the statue and fly seems impossible.

Confronted with this problem, she deliberately abandons both her thoughts of vengeance and her hope of escape, and agrees to give her life for Orestes.

P. 59, l. 1029, I think I dimly see.]—Compare *Electra*, translation, p. 42, where Electra suddenly solves the difficulty of slaying Clytemnestra.

P. 63, ll. 1075 ff., Be of good heart, sweet Mistress.]—The women of the Chorus are indeed "true of heart and faithful found," as Athena says later. And one feels that Iphigenia, after her first gush of gratitude, does not think of them much. She will save her brother, and they will be left with very little hope of ever seeing

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Greece, if indeed they are not fatally compromised by their share in the plot.—One can hardly blame Iphigenia; but it is like her.

P. 64, l. 1089, Bird of the sea rocks.]—A wonderful lyric, as spoken by these exiles waiting on the shore.—In their craving for home the island of Delos becomes the symbol for all that is Greek. Delos, the birth-place of Apollo and of a kinder Artemis than that which they now serve, was the meeting-place of all the Ionians. The palm-tree, the laurel, the olive, and the Orbed Lake of Delos were all celebrated in ritual poetry. The singing Swan is not a myth; it is a migratory swan, with a bell-like cry, which comes in the winter down from South Russia to Greece.

Isle of Pain and Love.]—Literally, “Beloved birth-pang of Leto.” When Leto was about to give birth to her twin children and no land would receive her, the little rock of Delos pitied her and gave her a resting-place.

P. 64, ll. 1106 ff., Ah the old tears.]—The singer’s mind goes back to her old grief, when her city was taken and she sold as a slave from market to market till she reached Thoas. Then comes the thought of Iphigenia’s happy voyage to Greece and freedom; then a dream-like longing to fly home, to watch the dances where once she danced for the prize of beauty.

P. 67, l. 1156, Iphigenia enters, carrying the Image.]—It would probably be a sort of Palladion—a rough figure with a shield (originally typifying the moon?), not very large. She would probably hold it in a robe of some sort, that her bare hand might not touch a thing so holy. At sight of Thoas she would probably

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cover it up altogether. It is not quite clear when she puts the image down.

P. 67, l. 1161, I unsay that word.]—It was a bad omen for Thoas to say at so critical a moment that a rule was broken. The priestess declares the word unsaid—just the opposite of “accepting” an omen.—Dr. Verrall, however, suggests to me that the line means, “I ask Hosia (the spirit of Holiness) to take in charge what I am going to say”; *i.e.* all the falsehoods into which she is about to plunge.

This scene of the fooling of Thoas is full of wit and double meanings. The end of it is rather like the famous scene in *Forget-me-not*, where the Corsican avenger is induced to turn his back in order to let a lady pass out of the room without being seen and compromised, the lady in question being really the person whom he has sworn to kill.

P. 72, ll. 1203 ff.]—This change of metre denotes increasing tension of excitement.

Each individual invention of Iphigenia seems clearly to have its purpose. She wants to combine a great appearance of precaution against the escape of the strangers—hence the soldiers, the bonds, &c.—with the greatest possible reality of precaution against any one preventing their escape: hence she takes the soldiers without an officer, the townsfolk are forbidden to follow or even to look, and the King is left at the Temple. The exact motive of all the veiling I do not see; perhaps it adds to the effect to represent Thoas as deliberately hiding his eyes while he is deceived. But in any case her precautions all seem sound according to ancient theology.

NOTES

P. 77, ll. 1235, 1282, Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow, &c.]—A curious and rather difficult little ritual hymn explaining how Apollo came from Delos to Delphi. It acts more as an interlude than anything else, to fill the time until we learn the issue of the attempt at escape.

All Delphi originally belonged to Mother Earth. The oracles were given by her daughter Themis, and the place guarded by an ancient earth-born Dragon. Apollo came, slew the Dragon, and turned Themis away. Earth took revenge upon him in a curious manner: she invented Dreams, which told the future freely, though, it would seem, confusedly, and, so to speak, spoiled the trade of Delphi until Apollo appealed to Zeus for protection.—The story is not very creditable to the gods, and is expressly denied by Aeschylus on that ground. According to them there was never any strife; Earth, Themis, Phoebê peacefully succeeded one another at Delphi, and Phoebê gave it as a birth-gift to Phoebus or Apollo.

I think the story is probably a case of the infant Sun slaying the Serpent of darkness. The ancient identification of Phoebus Apollo with the sun and Artemis-Hecate with the moon seems to me to withstand all modern criticisms, though of course there are many other elements combined with the Sun and Moon elements.

P. 79, l. 1284, Messenger.]—This excited rush upon the stage of a man clamouring for the King is very clever as a next step in the story. One sees at once the sort of thing that has happened, and wants to know what exactly.

EURIPIDES

P. 80, l. 1302, "This good messenger."—There is nothing to tell us what the good messenger is. Probably a large sacred knocker, such as were often on temple doors. (They served for suppliants to catch hold of as well as for summoning the people inside.) But it may be a gong or a horn hanging by the door, or the like.

P. 82, l. 1325, Aye tell thy tale.]—It is perhaps a little awkward that Thoas should ask for the whole story before taking any steps to pursue Iphigenia. But partly he is so amazed that he wants to hear all he can before moving; partly, he is represented as being really sure of his prey, as king of all the Taurian seas.

P. 83, l. 1350, The prow was held by stay-poles.]—The ship was afloat, having been just dragged off the shore, bow forwards. The men were raising the anchor, and holding the prow steady by long punt-poles. The ladder seems to have been a rope-ladder; but the Greek is difficult, and I do not know of any mention of a rope-ladder elsewhere in Greek literature.

P. 84, l. 1384, The Maid of Argos and the carven wood of Heaven.]—Observe how closely Iphigenia and the image are united. She appears with it in her arms; she must fly together with it, or die; she and the image enter the ship together. There is religion behind this. Perhaps there was some old statue of the goddess carrying her own image, as Athena sometimes carries a Palladion; when Iphigenia became the priestess and Artemis the goddess, this was interpreted as the priestess carrying the goddess' image.

P. 85, l. 1415, There is One who rules the sea.]—

NOTES

Poseidon, the sea god, was traditionally a friend of Troy. See the first scene of *The Trojan Women*.

P. 86, l. 1435, ATHENA.]—Modern readers complain a good deal of this appearance of the God from the Machine. Some day I hope to discuss the *Deus ex Machina* at length, but in the meantime I would point out the following facts: 1. A theophany or appearance of a god seems to have been in the essence of the original conception of Greek Drama; a study of the fragments of Aeschylus will illustrate this. What Euripides did, apparently, was to invent, or use when invented, an improved kind of stage machinery for introducing the god in the air. 2. The theophany seems to have been effective with the Greek audience, and I believe it would usually be so with any audience that was not highly sophisticated and accustomed to associate such appearances with pantomime fairies. 3. In nearly all cases the god who appears not only speaks lines of great beauty and serenity, but also comes with counsel and comfort which have something of heaven about them. The Dioscori of the *Electra* are most typical, healing the agony of revenge by sheer forgiveness; the beautiful Artemis of the *Hippolytus* is different, but divine also. But every case needs its special treatment.

P. 87, l. 1457, Artemis the Tauropole.]—On the rite of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae, see Preface, p. vi. There is a play on words in "Tauropole"; it is interesting to see that Euripides has prepared for it as early as Orestes' first speech, ll. 84 f., though I did not think it worth representing in English there.

ELECTRA

EURIPIDES
THE ELECTRA

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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INTRODUCTION ¹

THE *Electra* of Euripides has the distinction of being, perhaps, the best abused, and, one might add, not the best understood, of ancient tragedies. "A singular monument of poetical, or rather unpoetical perversity;" "the very worst of all his pieces;" are, for instance, the phrases applied to it by Schlegel. Considering that he judged it by the standards of conventional classicism, he could scarcely have arrived at any different conclusion. For it is essentially, and perhaps consciously, a protest against those standards. So, indeed, is the tragedy of *The Trojan Women*; but on very different lines. The *Electra* has none of the imaginative splendour, the vastness, the intense poetry, of that wonderful work. It is a close-knit, powerful, well-constructed play, as realistic as the tragic conventions will allow, intellectual and rebellious. Its psychology reminds one of Browning, or even of Ibsen.

To a fifth-century Greek all history came in the form of legend; and no less than three extant tragedies, Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* (456 B.C.), Euripides' *Electra* (413 B.C.), and Sophocles' *Electra* (date unknown: but perhaps the latest of the three) are based on the particular piece of legend or history now before us. It narrates how the son and daughter of the murdered king, Agamemnon, slew, in due

¹ Most of this introduction is reprinted, by the kind permission of the Editors, from an article in the *Independent Review*, vol. i., No. 4.

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course of revenge, and by Apollo's express command, their guilty mother and her paramour.

Homer had long since told the story, as he tells so many, simply and grandly, without moral questioning and without intensity. The atmosphere is heroic. It is all a blood-feud between chieftains, in which Orestes, after seven years, succeeds in slaying his foe Aegisthus, who had killed his father. He probably killed his mother also; but we are not directly told so. His sister may have helped him, and he may possibly have gone mad afterwards; but these painful issues are kept determinedly in the shade.

Somewhat surprisingly, Sophocles, although by his time Electra and Clytemnestra had become leading figures in the story and the mother-murder its essential climax, preserves a very similar atmosphere. His tragedy is enthusiastically praised by Schlegel for "the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, that is diffused over so dreadful a subject." "Everything dark and ominous is avoided. Orestes enjoys the fullness of health and strength. He is beset neither with doubts nor stings of conscience." Especially laudable is the "austerity" with which Aegisthus is driven into the house to receive, according to Schlegel, a specially ignominious death!

This combination of matricide and good spirits, however satisfactory to the determined classicist, will probably strike most intelligent readers as a little curious, and even, if one may use the word at all in connection with so powerful a play, undramatic. It becomes intelligible as soon as we observe that Sophocles was deliberately seeking what he regarded as an

INTRODUCTION

archaic or "Homeric" style (cf. Jebb, *Intro.* p. xli.); and this archaism, in its turn, seems to me best explained as a conscious reaction against Euripides' searching and unconventional treatment of the same subject (cf. Wilamowitz in *Hermes*, xviii, pp. 214 ff.). In the result Sophocles is not only more "classical" than Euripides; he is more primitive by far than Aeschylus.

For Aeschylus, though steeped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions, and above all would not, in that region, play at make-believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror; realises it; and tries to surmount it on the sweep of a great wave of religious emotion. The mother-murder, even if done by a god's command, is a sin; a sin to be expiated by unfathomable suffering. Yet, since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is a duty also. It is a sin that *must* be committed.

Euripides, here as often, represents intellectually the thought of Aeschylus carried a step further. He faced the problem just as Aeschylus did, and as Sophocles did not. But the solution offered by Aeschylus did not satisfy him. It cannot, in its actual details, satisfy any one. To him the mother-murder—like most acts of revenge, but more than most—was a sin and a horror. Therefore it should not have been committed; and the god who enjoined it *did* command evil, as he had done in a hundred other cases! He is no god of light; he is only a

INTRODUCTION

demon of old superstition, acting, among other influences, upon a sore-beset man, and driving him towards a miscalled duty, the horror of which, when done, will unseat his reason.

But another problem interests Euripides even more than this. What kind of man was it—above all, what kind of woman can it have been, who would do this deed of mother-murder, not in sudden fury but deliberately, as an act of “justice,” after many years? A “sympathetic” hero and heroine are out of the question; and Euripides does not deal in stage villains. He seeks real people. And few attentive readers of this play can doubt that he has found them.

The son is an exile, bred in the desperate hopes and wild schemes of exile; he is a prince without a kingdom, always dreaming of his wrongs and his restoration; and driven by the old savage doctrine, which an oracle has confirmed, of the duty and manliness of revenge. He is, as was shown by his later history, a man subject to overpowering impulses and to fits of will-less brooding. Lastly, he is very young, and is swept away by his sister's intenser nature.

That sister is the central figure of the tragedy. A woman shattered in childhood by the shock of an experience too terrible for a girl to bear; a poisoned and a haunted woman, eating her heart in ceaseless broodings of hate and love, alike unsatisfied—hate against her mother and stepfather, love for her dead father and her brother in exile; a woman who has known luxury and state, and cares much for them; who is intolerant of poverty, and who feels her youth

INTRODUCTION

passing away. And meantime there is her name, on which all legend, if I am not mistaken, insists; she is *A-lektra*, "the Unmated."

There is, perhaps, no woman's character in the range of Greek tragedy so profoundly studied. Not Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, not Phaedra nor Medea. One's thoughts can only wander towards two great heroines of "lost" plays, Althaea in the *Meleager*, and Stheneboea in the *Bellerophon*.

G. M.

ELECTRA

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CLYTEMNESTRA, *Queen of Argos and Mycenae; widow of Agamemnon.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, now in banishment.*

A PEASANT, *husband of Electra.*

AN OLD MAN, *formerly servant to Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophios, King of Phocis; friend to Orestes.*

AEGISTHUS, *usurping King of Argos and Mycenae, now husband of Clytemnestra.*

The Heroes CASTOR and POLYDEUCES.

CHORUS of Argive Women, with their LEADER.

FOLLOWERS of ORESTES; HANDMAIDS of CLYTEMNESTRA.

The Scene is laid in the mountains of Argos. The play was first produced between the years 414 and 412 B.C.

ELECTRA

The scene represents a hut on a desolate mountain side; the river Inachus is visible in the distance. The time is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The PEASANT is discovered in front of the hut.

PEASANT.

Old gleam on the face of the world, I give thee
hail,

River of Argos land, where sail on sail
The long ships met, a thousand, near and far,
When Agamemnon walked the seas in war;
Who smote King Priam in the dust, and burned
The storied streets of Ilion, and returned
Above all conquerors, heaping tower and fane
Of Argos high with spoils of Eastern slain.

So in far lands he prospered; and at home
His own wife trapped and slew him. 'Twas the doom
Aegisthus wrought, son of his father's foe.

Gone is that King, and the old spear laid low
That Tantalus wielded when the world was young.
Aegisthus hath his queen, and reigns among
His people. And the children here alone,
Orestes and Electra, buds unblown

EURIPIDES

Of man and womanhood, when forth to Troy
He shook his sail and left them—lo, the boy
Orestes, ere Aegisthus' hand could fall,
Was stolen from Argos—borne by one old thrall,
Who served his father's boyhood, over seas
Far off, and laid upon King Strophios' knees
In Phocis, for the old king's sake. But here
The maid Electra waited, year by year,
Alone, till the warm days of womanhood
Drew nigh and suitors came of gentle blood
In Hellas. Then Aegisthus was in fear
Lest she be wed in some great house, and bear
A son to avenge her father. Close he wrought
Her prison in his house, and gave her not
To any wooer. Then, since even this
Was full of peril, and the secret kiss
Of some bold prince might find her yet, and rend
Her prison walls, Aegisthus at the end
Would slay her. Then her mother, she so wild
Aforetime, pled with him and saved her child.
Her heart had still an answer for her lord
Murdered, but if the child's blood spoke, what word
Could meet the hate thereof? After that day
Aegisthus thus decreed: whoso should slay
The old king's wandering son, should win rich
meed
Of gold; and for Electra, she must wed
With me, not base of blood—in that I stand
True Mycenæan—but in gold and land
Most poor, which maketh highest birth as naught.
So from a powerless husband shall be wrought
A powerless peril. Had some man of might
Possessed her, he had called perchance to light

ELECTRA

Her father's blood, and unknown vengeance
Risen on Aegisthus yet.

Aye, mine she is:

But never yet these arms—the Cyprian knows
My truth!—have clasped her body, and she goes
A virgin still. Myself would hold it shame
To abase this daughter of a royal name.
I am too lowly to love violence. Yea,

Orestes too doth move me, far away,
Mine unknown brother! Will he ever now
Come back and see his sister bowed so low?

Doth any deem me fool, to hold a fair
Maid in my room and seek no joy, but spare
Her maidenhood? If any such there be,
Let him but look within. The fool is he
In gentle things, weighing the more and less
Of love by his own heart's untenderness.

[As he ceases ELECTRA comes out of the hut. She is in mourning garb, and carries a large pitcher on her head. She speaks without observing the PEASANT'S presence.]

ELECTRA.

Dark shepherdess of many a golden star,
Dost see me, Mother Night? And how this jar
Hath worn my earth-bowed head, as forth and fro
For water to the hillward springs I go?
Not for mere stress of need, but purpose set,
That never day nor night God may forget
Aegisthus' sin: aye, and perchance a cry
Cast forth to the waste shining of the sky

EURIPIDES

May find my father's ear. . . . The woman bred
Of Tyndareus, my mother—on her head
Be curses!—from my house hath outcast me;
She hath borne children to our enemy;
She hath made me naught, she hath made Orestes
naught. . . .

[*As the bitterness of her tone increases, the
PEASANT comes forward.*]

PEASANT.

What wouldst thou now, my sad one, ever fraught
With toil to lighten my toil? And so soft
Thy nurture was! Have I not chid thee oft,
And thou wilt cease not, serving without end?

ELECTRA (*turning to him with impulsive affection*).

O friend, my friend, as God might be my friend,
Thou only hast not trampled on my tears.
Life scarce can be so hard, 'mid many fears
And many shames, when mortal heart can find
Somewhere one healing touch, as my sick mind
Finds thee. . . . And should I wait thy word, to
endure

A little for thine easing, yea, or pour
My strength out in thy toiling fellowship?
Thou hast enough with fields and kine to keep;
'Tis mine to make all bright within the door.
'Tis joy to him that toils, when toil is o'er,
To find home waiting, full of happy things.

ELECTRA

PEASANT.

If so it please thee, go thy way. The springs
Are not far off. And I before the morn
Must drive my team afield, and sow the corn
In the hollows.—Not a thousand prayers can gain
A man's bare bread, save an he work amain.

[ELECTRA and the PEASANT depart on their several ways. After a few moments there enter stealthily two armed men, ORESTES and PYLADES.]

ORESTES.

Thou art the first that I have known, in deed
True, and my friend, and shelterer of my need.
Thou only, Pylades, of all that knew,
Hast held Orestes of some worth, all through
These years of helplessness, wherein I lie
Downtrodden by the murderer—yea, and by
The murderess, my mother! . . . I am come,
Fresh from the cleansing of Apollo, home
To Argos—and my coming no man yet
Knoweth—to pay the bloody twain their debt
Of blood. This very night I crept alone
To my dead father's grave, and poured thereon
My heart's first tears and tresses of my head
New-shorn, and o'er the barrow of the dead
Slew a black lamb, unknown of them that reign
In this unhappy land. . . . I am not fain
To pass the city gates, but hold me here
Hard on the borders. So my road is clear

EURIPIDES

To fly if men look close and watch my way;
If not, to seek my sister. For men say
She dwelleth in these hills, no more a maid
But wedded. I must find her house, for aid
To guide our work, and learn what hath betid
Of late in Argos.—Ha, the radiant lid
Of Dawn's eye lifteth! Come, friend; leave we now
This trodden path. Some worker of the plough,
Or serving damsel at her early task
Will presently come by, whom we may ask
If here my sister dwells. But soft! Even now
I see some bondmaid there, her death-shorn brow
Bending beneath its freight of well-water.
Lie close until she pass; then question her.
A slave might help us well, or speak some sign
Of import to this work of mine and thine.

[*The two men retire into ambush.* ELECTRA
enters, returning from the well.

ELECTRA.

Onward, O labouring tread,
As on move the years;
Onward amid thy tears,
O happier dead!

Let me remember. I am she, [Strophe 1.
Agamemnon's child, and the mother of me
Clytemnestra, the evil Queen,
Helen's sister. And folk, I ween,
That pass in the streets call yet my name
Electra. . . . God protect my shame!

ELECTRA

For toil, toil is a weary thing,
And life is heavy about my head;
And thou far off, O Father and King,
In the lost lands of the dead.
A bloody twain made these things be;
One was thy bitterest enemy,
And one the wife that lay by thee.

Brother, brother, on some far shore [Antistrophe 1.
Hast thou a city, is there a door
That knows thy footfall, Wandering One?
Who left me, left me, when all our pain
Was bitter about us, a father slain,
And a girl that wept in her room alone.
Thou couldst break me this bondage sore,
Only thou, who art far away,
Loose our father, and wake once more. . . .
Zeus, Zeus, dost hear me pray? . . .
The sleeping blood and the shame and the doom!
O feet that rest not, over the foam
Of distant seas, come home, come home!

What boots this cruse that I carry? [Strophe 2.
O, set free my brow!
For the gathered tears that tarry
Through the day and the dark till now,
Now in the dawn are free,
Father, and flow beneath
The floor of the world, to be
As a song in the house of Death:
From the rising up of the day
They guide my heart alway,
The silent tears unshed,
And my body mourns for the dead;

EURIPIDES

My cheeks bleed silently,
And these bruised temples keep
Their pain, remembering thee
And thy bloody sleep.

Be rent, O hair of mine head!

As a swan crying alone
Where the river windeth cold,
For a loved, for a silent one,
Whom the toils of the fowler hold,
I cry, Father, to thee,
O slain in misery!

The water, the wan water, [Antistrophe 2.
Lapped him, and his head
Drooped in the bed of slaughter
Low, as one wearied;
Woe for the edgèd axe,
And woe for the heart of hate,
Houndlike about thy tracks,
O conqueror desolate,
From Troy over land and sea,
Till a wife stood waiting thee;
Not with crowns did she stand,
Nor flowers of peace in her hand;
With Aegisthus' dagger drawn
For her hire she strove,
Through shame and through blood alone;
And won her a traitor's love.

[As she ceases there enter from right and
left the CHORUS, consisting of women of
Argos, young and old, in festal dress.

ELECTRA

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Child of the mighty dead, [Strophe.
Electra, lo, my way
To thee in the dawn hath sped,
And the cot on the mountain grey,
For the Watcher hath cried this day:
He of the ancient folk,
The walker of waste and hill,
Who drinketh the milk of the flock;
And he told of Hera's will;
For the morrow's morrow now
They cry her festival,
And before her throne shall bow
Our damsels all.

ELECTRA.

Not unto joy, nor sweet
Music, nor shining of gold,
The wings of my spirit beat.
Let the brides of Argos hold
Their dance in the night, as of old;
I lead no dance; I mark
No beat as the dancers sway;
With tears I dwell in the dark,
And my thought is of tears always,
To the going down of the day.
Look on my wasted hair
And raiment. . . . This that I bear,

EURIPIDES

Is it meet for the King my sire,
And her whom the King begot?
For Troy, that was burned with fire
And forgetteth not?

CHORUS.

Other Women.

Hera is great!—Ah, come, [Antistrophe.
Be kind; and my hand shall bring
Fair raiment, work of the loom,
And many a golden thing,
For joyous robe-wearing.
Deemest thou this thy woe
Shall rise unto God as prayer,
Or bend thine haters low?
Doth God for thy pain have care?
Not tears for the dead nor sighs,
But worship and joy divine
Shall win thee peace in thy skies,
O daughter mine!

ELECTRA.

No care cometh to God
For the voice of the helpless; none
For the crying of ancient blood.
Alas for him that is gone,
And for thee, O wandering one:
That now, methinks, in a land
Of the stranger must toil for hire,
And stand where the poor men stand,
A-cold by another's fire,
O son of the mighty sire:

ELECTRA

While I in a beggar's cot
On the wrecked hills, changing not,
Starve in my soul for food;
But our mother lieth wed
In another's arms, and blood
Is about her bed.

LEADER.

On all of Greece she wrought great jeopardy,
Thy mother's sister, Helen,—and on thee.

[ORESTES and PYLADES move out from their
concealment; ORESTES comes forward: PY-
LADES beckons to two ARMED SERVANTS
and stays with them in the background.]

ELECTRA.

Woe's me! No more of wailing! Women, flee!
Strange armed men beside the dwelling there
Lie ambushed! They are rising from their lair.
Back by the road, all you. I will essay
The house; and may our good feet save us!

ORESTES (*between ELECTRA and the hut*).

Stay,
Unhappy woman! Never fear my steel.

ELECTRA (*in utter panic*).

O bright Apollo! Mercy! See, I kneel;
Slay me not.

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

Others I have yet to slay
Less dear than thou.

ELECTRA.

Go from me! Wouldst thou lay
Hand on a body that is not for thee?

ORESTES.

None is there I would touch more righteously.

ELECTRA.

Why lurk'st thou by my house? And why a sword?

ORESTES.

Stay. Listen! Thou wilt not gainsay my word.

ELECTRA.

There—I am still. Do what thou wilt with me.
Thou art too strong.

ORESTES.

A word I bear to thee . . .
Word of thy brother.

ELECTRA.

Oh, friend! More than friend!
Living or dead?

ORESTES.

He lives; so let me send
My comfort foremost, ere the rest be heard.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

God love thee for the sweetness of thy word!

ORESTES.

God love the twain of us, both thee and me.

ELECTRA.

He lives! Poor brother! In what land weareth he
His exile?

ORESTES.

Not one region nor one lot
His wasted life hath trod.

ELECTRA.

He lacketh not
For bread?

ORESTES.

Bread hath he; but a man is weak
In exile.

ELECTRA.

What charge laid he on thee? Speak.

ORESTES.

To learn if thou still live, and how the storm,
Living, hath struck thee.

ELECTRA.

That thou seest; this form
Wasted . . .

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

Yea, riven with the fire of woe.
I sigh to look on thee.

ELECTRA.

My face; and, lo,
My temples of their ancient glory shorn.

ORESTES.

Methinks thy brother haunts thee, being forlorn;
Aye, and perchance thy father, whom they slew . . .

ELECTRA.

What should be nearer to me than those two?

ORESTES.

And what to him, thy brother, half so dear
As thou?

ELECTRA.

His is a distant love, not near
At need.

ORESTES.

But why this dwelling place, this life
Of loneliness?

ELECTRA (*with sudden bitterness*).

Stranger, I am a wife. . . .
O better dead!

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

That seals thy brother's doom!
What Prince of Argos . . . ?

ELECTRA.

Not the man to whom
My father thought to give me.

ORESTES.

Speak; that I
May tell thy brother all.

ELECTRA.

'Tis there, hard by,
His dwelling, where I live, far from men's eyes.

ORESTES.

Some ditcher's cot, or cowherd's, by its guise!

ELECTRA (*struck with shame for her ingratitude*).
A poor man; but true-hearted, and to me
God-fearing.

ORESTES.

How? What fear of God hath he?

ELECTRA.

He hath never held my body to his own.

ORESTES.

Hath he some vow to keep? Or is it done
To scorn thee?

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA.

Nay; he only scorns to sin
Against my father's greatness.

ORESTES.

But to win
A princess! Doth his heart not leap for pride?

ELECTRA.

He honoureth not the hand that gave the bride.

ORESTES.

I see. He trembles for Orestes' wrath?

ELECTRA.

Aye, that would move him. But beside, he hath
A gentle heart.

ORESTES.

Strange! A good man. . . . I swear
He well shall be requited.

ELECTRA.

Whensoe'er
Our wanderer comes again!

ORESTES.

Thy mother stays
Unmoved 'mid all thy wrong?

ELECTRA.

A lover weighs
More than a child in any woman's heart.

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

But what end seeks Aegisthus, by such art
Of shame?

ELECTRA.

To make mine unborn children low
And weak, even as my husband.

ORESTES.

Lest there grow
From thee the avenger?

ELECTRA.

Such his purpose is:
For which may I requite him!

ORESTES.

And of this
Thy virgin life—Aegisthus knows it?

ELECTRA.

Nay,
We speak it not. It cometh not his way.

ORESTES.

These women hear us. Are they friends to thee?

ELECTRA.

Aye, friends and true. They will keep faithfully
All words of mine and thine.

EURIPIDES

ORESTES (*trying her*).

Thou art well stayed
With friends. And could Orestes give thee aid
In aught, if e'er . . .

ELECTRA.

Shame on thee! Seest thou not?
Is it not time?

ORESTES (*catching her excitement*).

How time? And if he sought
To slay, how should he come at his desire?

ELECTRA.

By daring, as they dared who slew his sire!

ORESTES.

Wouldst thou dare with him, if he came, thou too,
To slay her?

ELECTRA.

Yes; with the same axe that slew
My father!

ORESTES.

'Tis thy message? And thy mood
Unchanging?

ELECTRA.

Let me shed my mother's blood,
And I die happy.

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

God! . . . I would that now
Orestes heard thee here.

ELECTRA.

Yet, wottest thou,
Though here I saw him, I should know him not.

ORESTES.

Surely. Ye both were children, when they wrought
Your parting.

ELECTRA.

One alone in all this land
Would know his face.

ORESTES.

The thrall, methinks, whose hand
Stole him from death—or so the story ran?

ELECTRA.

He taught my father, too, an old old man
Of other days than these.

ORESTES.

Thy father's grave . . .
He had due rites and tendance?

ELECTRA.

What chance gave,
My father had, cast out to rot in the sun.

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

God, 'tis too much! . . . To hear of such things done
Even to a stranger, stings a man. . . . But speak,
Tell of thy life, that I may know, and seek
Thy brother with a tale that must be heard
Howe'er it sicken. If mine eyes be blurred,
Remember, 'tis the fool that feels not. Aye,
Wisdom is full of pity; and thereby
Men pay for too much wisdom with much pain.

LEADER.

My heart is moved as this man's. I would fain
Learn all thy tale. Here dwelling on the hills
Little I know of Argos and its ills.

ELECTRA.

If I must speak—and at love's call, God knows,
I fear not—I will tell thee all; my woes,
My father's woes, and—O, since thou hast stirred
This storm of speech, thou bear him this my word—
His woes and shame! Tell of this narrow cloak
In the wind; this grime and reek of toil, that choke
My breathing; this low roof that bows my head
After a king's. This raiment . . . thread by thread,
'Tis I must weave it, or go bare—must bring,
Myself, each jar of water from the spring.
No holy day for me, no festival,
No dance upon the green! From all, from all
I am cut off. No portion hath my life
'Mid wives of Argos, being no true wife.
No portion where the maidens throng to praise
Castor—my Castor, whom in ancient days,

ELECTRA

Ere he passed from us and men worshipped him,
They named my bridegroom!—

And she, she! . . . The grim
Troy spoils gleam round her throne, and by each
hand

Queens of the East, my father's prisoners, stand,
A cloud of Orient webs and tangling gold.
And there upon the floor, the blood, the old
Black blood, yet crawls and cankers, like a rot
In the stone! And on our father's chariot
The murderer's foot stands glorying, and the red
False hand uplifts that ancient staff, that led
The armies of the world! . . . Aye, tell him how
The grave of Agamemnon, even now,
Lacketh the common honour of the dead;
A desert barrow, where no tears are shed,
No tresses hung, no gift, no myrtle spray.
And when the wine is in him, so men say,
Our mother's mighty master leaps thereon,
Spurning the slab, or pelteth stone on stone,
Flouting the lone dead and the twain that live:
"Where is thy son Orestes? Doth he give
Thy tomb good tendance? Or is all forgot?"
So is he scorned because he cometh not. . . .

O Stranger, on my knees, I charge thee, tell
This tale, not mine, but of dumb wrongs that swell
Crowding—and I the trumpet of their pain,
This tongue, these arms, this bitter burning brain;
These dead shorn locks, and he for whom they
died!

His father slew Troy's thousands in their pride:
He hath but one to kill. . . . O God, but one!
Is he a man, and Agamemnon's son?

EURIPIDES

LEADER.

But hold: is this thy husband from the plain,
His labour ended, hasting home again?

Enter the PEASANT.

PEASANT.

Ha, who be these? Strange men in arms before
My house! What would they at this lonely door?
Seek they for me?—Strange gallants should not stay
A woman's goings.

ELECTRA.

Friend and helper!—Nay,
Think not of any evil. These men be
Friends of Orestes, charged with words for me! . . .
Strangers, forgive his speech.

PEASANT.

What word have they
Of him? At least he lives and sees the day?

ELECTRA.

So fares their tale—and sure I doubt it not!

PEASANT.

And ye two still are living in his thought,
Thou and his father?

ELECTRA.

In his dreams we live.
An exile hath small power.

ELECTRA

PEASANT.

And did he give
Some privy message?

ELECTRA.

None: they come as spies
For news of me.

PEASANT.

Thine outward news their eyes
Can see; the rest, methinks, thyself will tell.

ELECTRA.

They have seen all, heard all. I trust them well.

PEASANT.

Why were our doors not open long ago?—
Be welcome, strangers both, and pass below
My lintel. In return for your glad words
Be sure all greeting that mine house affords
Is yours.—Ye followers, bear in their gear!—
Gainsay me not; for his sake are ye dear
That sent you to our house; and though my part
In life be low, I am no churl at heart.

[*The PEASANT goes to the ARMED SERVANTS at
the back, to help them with the baggage.*]

ORESTES (*aside to ELECTRA*).

Is this the man that shields thy maidenhood
Unknown, and will not wrong thy father's blood?

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA.

He is called my husband. 'Tis for him I toil.

ORESTES.

How dark lies honour hid! And what turmoil
In all things human: sons of mighty men
Fallen to naught, and from ill seed again
Good fruit: yea, famine in the rich man's scroll
Writ deep, and in poor flesh a lordly soul.
As, lo, this man, not great in Argos, not
With pride of house uplifted, in a lot
Of unmarked life hath shown a prince's grace.

[*To the PEASANT, who has returned.*

All that is here of Agamemnon's race,
And all that lacketh yet, for whom we come,
Do thank thee, and the welcome of thy home
Accept with gladness.—Ho, men; hasten ye
Within!—This open-hearted poverty
Is blither to my sense than feasts of gold.

Lady, thine husband's welcome makes me bold;
Yet would thou hadst thy brother, before all
Confessed, to greet us in a prince's hall!
Which may be, even yet. Apollo spake
The word; and surely, though small store I make
Of man's divining, God will fail us not.

[*ORESTES and PYLADES go in, following the
SERVANTS.*

LEADER.

O never was the heart of hope so hot
Within me. How? So moveless in time past,
Hath Fortune girded up her loins at last?

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Now know'st thou not thine own ill furniture,
To bid these strangers in, to whom for sure
Our best were hardship, men of gentle breed?

PEASANT.

Nay, if the men be gentle, as indeed
I deem them, they will take good cheer or ill
With even kindness.

ELECTRA.

'Twas ill done; but still—

Go, since so poor thou art, to that old friend
Who reared my father. At the realm's last end
He dwells, where Tanaos river foams between
Argos and Sparta. Long time hath he been
An exile 'mid his flocks. Tell him what thing
Hath chanced on me, and bid him haste and bring
Meat for the strangers' tending.—Glad, I trow,
That old man's heart will be, and many a vow
Will lift to God, to learn the child he stole
From death, yet breathes.—I will not ask a dole
From home; how should my mother help me? Nay,
I pity him that seeks that door, to say
Orestes liveth!

PEASANT.

Wilt thou have it so?

I will take word to the old man. But go
Quickly within, and whatso there thou find
Set out for them. A woman, if her mind
So turn, can light on many a pleasant thing
To fill her board. And surely plenishing
We have for this one day.—'Tis in such shifts

EURIPIDES

As these, I care for riches, to make gifts
To friends, or lead a sick man back to health
With ease and plenty. Else small aid is wealth
For daily gladness; once a man be done
With hunger, rich and poor are all as one.

[*The PEASANT goes off to the left; ELECTRA
goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

O for the ships of Troy, the beat [Strophe 1.
Of oars that shimmered
Innumerable, and dancing feet
Of Nereids glimmered;
And dolphins, drunken with the lyre,
Across the dark blue prows, like fire,
Did bound and quiver,
To cleave the way for Thetis' son,
Fleet-in-the-wind Achilles, on
To war, to war, till Troy be won
Beside the reedy river.

Up from Eubœa's caverns came [Antistrophe 1.
The Nereids, bearing
Gold armour from the Lords of Flame,
Wrought for his wearing:
Long sought those daughters of the deep,
Up Pelion's glen, up Ossa's steep
Forest enchanted,
Where Peleus reared alone, afar,
His lost sea-maiden's child, the star
Of Hellas, and swift help of war
When weary armies panted.

ELECTRA

There came a man from Troy, and told [Strophe 2.

Here in the haven,
How, orb on orb, to strike with cold
The Trojan, o'er that targe of gold,
Dread shapes were graven.
All round the level rim thereof
Perseus, on wingèd feet, above
The long seas hied him;
The Gorgon's wild and bleeding hair
He lifted; and a herald fair,
He of the wilds, whom Maia bare,
God's Hermes, flew beside him.

[Antistrophe 2.

But midmost, where the boss rose higher,
A sun stood blazing,
And wingèd steeds, and stars in choir,
Hyad and Pleiad, fire on fire,
For Hector's dazing:
Across the golden helm, each way,
Two taloned Sphinxes held their prey,
Song-drawn to slaughter:
And round the breastplate ramping came
A mingled breed of lion and flame,
Hot-eyed to tear that steed of fame
That found Pirênê's water.

The red red sword with steeds four-yoked [Epode.

Black-maned, was graven,
That laboured, and the hot dust smoked
Cloudwise to heaven.

EURIPIDES

Thou Tyndarid woman! Fair and tall
Those warriors were, and o'er them all
One king great-hearted,
Whom thou and thy false love did slay:
Therefore the tribes of Heaven one day
For these thy dead shall send on thee
An iron death: yea, men shall see
The white throat drawn, and blood's red spray,
And lips in terror parted.

*[As they cease, there enters from the left a very
old man, bearing a lamb, a wineskin, and
a wallet.]*

OLD MAN.

Where is my little Princess? Ah, not now;
But still my queen, who tended long ago
The lad that was her father. . . . How steep-set
These last steps to her porch! But faint not yet:
Onward, ye failing knees and back with pain
Bowed, till we look on that dear face again.

[Enter ELECTRA.]

Ah, daughter, is it thou?—Lo, here I am,
With gifts from all my store; this suckling lamb
Fresh from the ewe, green crowns for joyfulness,
And creamy things new-curdled from the press.
And this long-stored juice of vintages
Forgotten, cased in fragrance: scant it is,
But passing sweet to mingle nectar-wise
With feebler wine.—Go, bear them in; mine eyes . . .
Where is my cloak?—They are all blurred with
tears.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

What ails thine eyes, old friend? After these years
Doth my low plight still stir thy memories?
Or think'st thou of Orestes, where he lies
In exile, and my father? Aye, long love
Thou gavest him, and seest the fruit thereof
Wasted, for thee and all who love thee!

OLD MAN.

All

Wasted! And yet 'tis that lost hope withal
I cannot brook. But now I turned aside
To see my master's grave. All, far and wide,
Was silence; so I bent these knees of mine
And wept and poured drink-offerings from the wine
I bear the strangers, and about the stone
Laid myrtle sprays. And, child, I saw thereon
Just at the censer slain, a fleecèd ewe,
Deep black, in sacrifice: the blood was new
About it: and a tress of bright brown hair
Shorn as in mourning, close. Long stood I there
And wondered, of all men what man had gone
In mourning to that grave.—My child, 'tis none
In Argos. Did there come . . . Nay, mark me
now . . .

Thy brother in the dark, last night, to bow
His head before that unadorèd tomb?

O come, and mark the colour of it. Come
And lay thine own hair by that mourner's tress!
A hundred little things make likenesses
In brethren born, and show the father's blood.

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA (*trying to mask her excitement and resist the contagion of his*).

Old heart, old heart, is this a wise man's mood? . . .
O, not in darkness, not in fear of men,
Shall Argos find him, when he comes again,
Mine own undaunted . . . Nay, and if it were,
What likeness could there be? My brother's hair
Is as a prince's and a rover's, strong
With sunlight and with strife: not like the long
Locks that a woman combs. . . . And many a head
Hath this same semblance, wing for wing, tho' bred
Of blood not ours. . . . 'Tis hopeless. Peace, old
man.

OLD MAN.

The footprints! Set thy foot by his, and scan
The track of frame and muscles, how they fit!

ELECTRA.

That ground will take no footprint! All of it
Is bitter stone. . . . It hath? . . . And who hath
said

There should be likeness in a brother's tread
And sister's? His is stronger every way.

OLD MAN.

But hast thou nothing . . . ? If he came this day
And sought to show thee, is there no one sign
Whereby to know him? . . . Stay; the robe was
thine,

Work of thy loom, wherein I wrapt him o'er
That night, and stole him through the murderers' door.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Thou knowest, when Orestes was cast out
I was a child. . . . If I did weave some clout
Of raiment, would he keep the vesture now
He wore in childhood? Should my weaving grow
As his limbs grew? . . . 'Tis lost long since. No
more!

O, either 'twas some stranger passed, and shore
His locks for very ruth before that tomb:
Or, if he found perchance, to seek his home,
Some spy . . .

OLD MAN.

The strangers! Where are they? I fain
Would see them, aye, and bid them answer plain . . .

ELECTRA.

Here at the door! How swift upon the thought!

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

OLD MAN.

High-born: albeit for that I trust them not.
The highest oft are false. . . . Howe'er it be,
[*Approaching them.*

I bid the strangers hail!

ORESTES.

All hail to thee,
Greybeard!—Prithee, what man of all the King
Trusted of old, is now this broken thing?

ELECTRA.

'Tis he that trained my father's boyhood.

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

How?
And stole from death thy brother? Sayest thou?

ELECTRA.

This man was his deliverer, if it be
Deliverance.

ORESTES.

How his old eye pierceth me,
As one that testeth silver and alloy!
Sees he some likeness here?

ELECTRA.

Perchance 'tis joy,
To see Orestes' comrade, that he feels.

ORESTES.

None dearer.—But what ails the man? He reels
Dizzily back.

ELECTRA.

I marvel. I can say
No more.

OLD MAN (*in a broken voice*).

Electra, mistress, daughter, pray!
Pray unto God!

ELECTRA.

Of all the things I crave,
The thousand things, or all that others have,
What should I pray for?

ELECTRA

OLD MAN.

Pray thine arms may hold
At last this treasure-dream of more than gold
God shows us!

ELECTRA.

God, I pray thee! . . . Wouldst thou more?

OLD MAN.

Gaze now upon this man, and bow before
Thy dearest upon earth!

ELECTRA.

I gaze on thee!
O, hath time made thee mad?

OLD MAN.

Mad, that I see
Thy brother?

ELECTRA.

My . . . I know not what thou say'st:
I looked not for it . . .

OLD MAN.

I tell thee, here confessed
Standeth Orestes, Agamemnon's son!

ELECTRA.

A sign before I trust thee! O, but one!
How dost thou know . . . ?

EURIPIDES

OLD MAN.

There, by his brow, I see
The scar he made, that day he ran with thee
Chasing thy fawn, and fell.

ELECTRA (*in a dull voice*).

A scar? 'Tis so.

I see a scar.

OLD MAN.

And fearest still to throw
Thine arms round him thou lovest?

ELECTRA.

O, no more!
Thy sign hath conquered me. . . . (*throwing herself
into ORESTES' arms*). At last, at last!
Thy face like light! And do I hold thee fast,
Unhoped for?

ORESTES.

Yea, at last! And I hold thee.

ELECTRA.

I never knew . . .

ORESTES.

I dreamed not.

ELECTRA.

Is it he,

Orestes?

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

Thy defender, yea, alone
To fight the world! Lo, this day have I thrown
A net, which once unbroken from the sea
Drawn home, shall . . . O, and it must surely be!
Else men shall know there is no God, no light
In Heaven, if wrong to the end shall conquer right.

CHORUS.

Comest thou, comest thou now,
Chained by the years and slow,
O Day long sought?
A light on the mountains cold
Is lit, yea, a fire burneth.
'Tis the light of one that turneth
From roamings manifold,
Back out of exile old
To the house that knew him not.

Some spirit hath turned our way,
Victory visible,
Walking at thy right hand,
Belovèd; O lift this day
Thine arms, thy voice, as a spell;
And pray for thy brother, pray,
Threading the perilous land,
That all be well!

ORESTES.

Enough; this dear delight is mine at last
Of thine embracing; and the hour comes fast

EURIPIDES

When we shall stand again as now we stand,
And stint not.—Stay, Old Man: thou, being at hand
At the edge of time, advise me, by what way
Best to requite my father's murderers. Say,
Have I in Argos any still to trust;
Or is the love, once borne me, trod in dust,
Even as my fortunes are? Whom shall I seek?
By day or night? And whither turn, to wreak
My will on them that hate us? Say.

OLD MAN.

My son,

In thine adversity, there is not one
Will call thee friend. Nay, that were treasure-trove,
A friend to share, not faltering from love,
Fair days and foul the same. Thy name is gone
Forth to all Argos, as a thing o'erthrown
And dead. Thou hast not left one spark to glow
With hope in one friend's heart! Hear all, and
know:
Thou hast God's fortune and thine own right hand,
Naught else, to conquer back thy fatherland.

ORESTES.

The deed, the deed! What must we do?

OLD MAN.

Strike down

Aegisthus . . . and thy mother.

ORESTES.

'Tis the crown
My race is run for. But how find him?

ELECTRA

OLD MAN.

Not

Within the city walls, however hot
Thy spirit.

ORESTES.

Ha! With watchers doth he go
Begirt, and mailèd pikemen?

OLD MAN.

Even so:

He lives in fear of thee, and night nor day
Hath slumber.

ORESTES.

That way blocked!—'Tis thine to say
What next remains.

OLD MAN.

I will; and thou give ear.
A thought has found me!

ORESTES.

All good thoughts be near,
For thee to speak and me to understand!

OLD MAN.

But now I saw Aegisthus, close at hand
As here I journeyed.

ORESTES.

That good word shall trace
My path for me! Thou saw'st him? In what place?

EURIPIDES

OLD MAN.

Out on the pastures where his horses stray.

ORESTES.

What did he there so far?—A gleam of day
Crosseth our darkness.

OLD MAN.

'Twas a feast, methought,
Of worship to the wild-wood nymphs he wrought.

ORESTES.

The watchers of men's birth? Is there a son
New born to him, or doth he pray for one
That cometh? [*Movement of ELECTRA.*]

OLD MAN.

More I know not; he had there
A wreathèd ox, as for some weighty prayer.

ORESTES.

What force was with him? Not his serfs alone?

OLD MAN.

No Argive lord was there; none but his own
Household.

ORESTES.

Not any that might know my race,
Or guess?

OLD MAN.

Thralls, thralls; who ne'er have seen thy face.

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

Once I prevail, the thralls will welcome me!

OLD MAN.

The slaves' way, that; and no ill thing for thee!

ORESTES.

How can I once come near him?

OLD MAN.

Walk thy ways
Hard by, where he may see thee, ere he slays
His sacrifice.

ORESTES.

How? Is the road so nigh?

OLD MAN.

He cannot choose but see thee, passing by,
And bid thee stay to share the beast they kill.

ORESTES.

A bitter fellow-feaster, if God will!

OLD MAN.

And then . . . then swift be heart and brain, to see
God's chances!

ORESTES.

Aye. Well hast thou counselled me.
But . . . where is she?

EURIPIDES

OLD MAN.

In Argos now, I guess;
But goes to join her husband, ere the press
Of the feast.

ORESTES.

Why goeth not my mother straight
Forth at her husband's side?

OLD MAN.

She fain will wait
Until the gathered country-folk be gone.

ORESTES.

Enough! She knows what eyes are turned upon
Her passings in the land!

OLD MAN.

Aye, all men hate
The unholy woman.

ORESTES.

How then can I set
My snare for wife and husband in one breath?

ELECTRA (*coming forward*).

Hold! It is I must work our mother's death.

ORESTES.

If that be done, I think the other deed
Fortune will guide.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

This man must help our need,
One friend alone for both.

OLD MAN.

He will, he will!
Speak on. What cunning hast thou found to fill
Thy purpose?

ELECTRA.

Get thee forth, Old Man, and quick
Tell Clytemnestra . . . tell her I lie sick,
New-mothered of a man-child.

OLD MAN.

Thou hast borne
A son! But when?

ELECTRA.

Let this be the tenth morn.
Till then a mother stays in sanctity,
Unseen.

OLD MAN.

And if I tell her, where shall be
The death in this?

ELECTRA.

That word let her but hear,
Straight she will seek me out!

EURIPIDES

OLD MAN.

The queen! What care
Hath she for thee, or pain of thine?

ELECTRA.

She will;
And weep my babe's low station!

OLD MAN.

Thou hast skill
To know her, child; say on.

ELECTRA.

But bring her here,
Here to my hand; the rest will come.

OLD MAN.

I swear,
Here at the gate she shall stand palpable!

ELECTRA.

The gate: the gate that leads to me and Hell.

OLD MAN.

Let me but see it, and I die content.

ELECTRA.

First, then, my brother: see his steps be bent . . .

OLD MAN.

Straight yonder, where Aegisthus makes his prayer!

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Then seek my mother's presence, and declare
My news.

OLD MAN.

Thy very words, child, as tho' spoke
From thine own lips!

ELECTRA.

Brother, thine hour is struck.
Thou standest in the van of war this day.

ORESTES (*rousing himself*).

Aye, I am ready. . . . I will go my way,
If but some man will guide me.

OLD MAN.

Here am I,
To speed thee to the end, right thankfully.

ORESTES (*turning as he goes and raising his hands to
heaven*).

Zeus of my sires, Zeus of the lost battle,

ELECTRA.

Have pity; have pity; we have earned it well!

OLD MAN.

Pity these twain, of thine own body sprung!

ELECTRA.

O Queen o'er Argive altars, Hera high,

EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

Grant us thy strength, if for the right we cry.

OLD MAN.

Strength to these twain, to right their father's wrong!

ELECTRA.

O Earth, deep Earth, to whom I yearn in vain,

ORESTES.

And deeper thou, O father darkly slain,

OLD MAN.

Thy children call, who love thee: hearken thou!

ORESTES.

Girt with thine own dead armies, wake, O wake!

ELECTRA.

With all that died at Ilion for thy sake . . .

OLD MAN.

And hate earth's dark defilers; help us now!

ELECTRA.

Dost hear us yet, O thou in deadly wrong,
Wronged by my mother?

OLD MAN.

Child, we stay too long.
He hears; be sure he hears!

ELECTRA.

And while he hears,
I speak this word for omen in his ears:

ELECTRA

"Aegisthus dies, Aegisthus dies." . . . Ah me,
My brother, should it strike not him, but thee,
This wrestling with dark death, behold, I too
Am dead that hour. Think of me as one true,
Not one that lives. I have a sword made keen
For this, and shall strike deep.

I will go in
And make all ready. If there come from thee
Good tidings, all my house for ecstasy
Shall cry; and if we hear that thou art dead,
Then comes the other end!—Lo, I have said.

ORESTES.

I know all, all.

ELECTRA.

Then be a man to-day!

[ORESTES and the OLD MAN depart.]

O Women, let your voices from this fray
Flash me a fiery signal, where I sit,
The sword across my knees, expecting it.
For never, though they kill me, shall they touch
My living limbs!—I know my way thus much.
[*She goes into the house.*]

CHORUS.

When white-haired folk are met [*Strophe.*]
In Argos about the fold,
A story lingereth yet,
A voice of the mountains old,
That tells of the Lamb of Gold:

EURIPIDES

A lamb from a mother mild,
But the gold of it curled and beat;
And Pan, who holdeth the keys of the wild,
Bore it to Atreus' feet:
His wild reed pipes he blew,
And the reeds were filled with peace,
And a joy of singing before him flew,
Over the fiery fleece:
And up on the basèd rock,
As a herald cries, cried he:
"Gather ye, gather, O Argive folk,
The King's Sign to see,
The sign of the blest of God,
For he that hath this, hath all!"
Therefore the dance of praise they trod
In the Atreïd brethren's hall.

They opened before men's eyes [Antistrophe.
That which was hid before,
The chambers of sacrifice,
The dark of the golden door,
And fires on the altar floor.
And bright was every street,
And the voice of the Muses' tree,
The carven lotus, was lifted sweet;
When afar and suddenly,
Strange songs, and a voice that grew:
"Come to your king, ye folk!
Mine, mine is the Golden Ewe!"
'Twas dark Thyestes spoke.
For, lo, when the world was still,
With his brother's bride he lay,
And won her to work his will,
And they stole the Lamb away!

ELECTRA

Then forth to the folk strode he,
And called them about his fold,
And showed that Sign of the King to be,
The fleece and the horns of gold.

Then, then, the world was changed; [*Strophe 2.*
And the Father, where they ranged,
Shook the golden stars and glowing,
And the great Sun stood deranged
In the glory of his going.

Lo, from that day forth, the East
Bears the sunrise on his breast,
And the flaming Day in heaven
Down the dim ways of the west
Driveth, to be lost at even.

The wet clouds to Northward beat;
And Lord Ammon's desert seat
Crieth from the South, unslaken,
For the dews that once were sweet,
For the rain that God hath taken.

'Tis a children's tale, that old [*Antistrophe 2.*
Shepherds on far hills have told;
And we reck not of their telling,
Deem not that the Sun of gold
Ever turned his fiery dwelling,

Or beat backward in the sky,
For the wrongs of man, the cry
Of his ailing tribes assembled,
To do justly, ere they die!
Once, men told the tale, and trembled;

EURIPIDES

Fearing God, O Queen: whom thou
Hast forgotten, till thy brow
With old blood is dark and daunted.
And thy brethren, even now,
Walk among the stars, enchanted.

LEADER.

Ha, friends, was that a voice? Or some dream
sound
Of voices shaketh me, as underground
God's thunder shuddering? Hark, again, and clear!
It swells upon the wind.—Come forth and hear!
Mistress, Electra!

ELECTRA, *a bare sword in her hand, comes
from the house.*

ELECTRA.

Friends! Some news is brought?
How hath the battle ended?

LEADER.

I know naught.
There seemed a cry as of men massacred!

ELECTRA.

I heard it too. Far off, but still I heard.

LEADER.

A distant floating voice . . . Ah, plainer now!

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Of Argive anguish!—Brother, is it thou?

LEADER.

I know not. Many confused voices cry . . .

ELECTRA.

Death, then for me! That answer bids me die.

LEADER.

Nay, wait! We know not yet thy fortune. Wait!

ELECTRA.

No messenger from him!—Too late, too late!

LEADER.

The message yet will come. 'Tis not a thing
So light of compass, to strike down a king.

Enter a MESSENGER, running.

MESSENGER.

Victory, Maids of Argos, Victory!
Orestes . . . all that love him, list to me! . . .
Hath conquered! Agamemnon's murderer lies
Dead! O give thanks to God with happy cries!

ELECTRA.

Who art thou? I mistrust thee. . . . 'Tis a plot!

MESSENGER.

Thy brother's man. Look well. Dost know me not?

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA.

Friend, friend; my terror made me not to see
Thy visage. Now I know and welcome thee.
How sayst thou? He is dead, verily dead,
My father's murderer . . . ?

MESSENGER.

Shall it be said
Once more? I know again and yet again
Thy heart would hear. Aegisthus lieth slain!

ELECTRA.

Ye Gods! And thou, O Right, that seest all,
Art come at last? . . . But speak; how did he fall?
How swooped the wing of death? . . . I crave
to hear.

MESSENGER.

Forth of this hut we set our faces clear
To the world, and struck the open chariot road;
Then on toward the pasture lands, where stood
The great Lord of Mycenae. In a set
Garden beside a channelled rivulet,
Culling a myrtle garland for his brow,
He walked: but hailed us as we passed: "How now,
Strangers! Who are ye? Of what city sprung,
And whither bound?" "Thessalians," answered
young
Orestes: "to Alpheüs journeying,
With gifts to Olympian Zeus." Whereat the king:
"This while, beseech you, tarry, and make full
The feast upon my hearth. We slay a bull

ELECTRA

Here to the Nymphs. Set forth at break of day
To-morrow, and 'twill cost you no delay.
But come"—and so he gave his hand, and led
The two men in—"I must not be gainsaid;
Come to the house. Ho, there; set close at hand
Vats of pure water, that the guests may stand
At the altar's verge, where falls the holy spray."
Then quickly spake Orestes: "By the way
We cleansed us in a torrent stream. We need
No purifying here. But if indeed
Strangers may share thy worship, here are we
Ready, O King, and swift to follow thee."

So spoke they in the midst. And every thrall
Laid down the spears they served the King withal,
And hied him to the work. Some bore amain
The death-vat, some the corbs of hallowed grain;
Or kindled fire, and round the fire and in
Set cauldrons foaming; and a festal din
Filled all the place. Then took thy mother's lord
The ritual grains, and o'er the altar poured
Its due, and prayed: "O Nymphs of Rock and
Mere,
With many a sacrifice for many a year,
May I and she who waits at home for me,
My Tyndarid Queen, adore you. May it be
Peace with us always, even as now; and all
Ill to mine enemies"—meaning withal
Thee and Orestes. Then my master prayed
Against that prayer, but silently, and said
No word, to win once more his fatherland.
Then in the corb Aegisthus set his hand,
Took the straight blade, cut from the proud bull's head
A lock, and laid it where the fire was red;

EURIPIDES

Then, while the young men held the bull on high,
Slew it with one clean gash; and suddenly
Turned on thy brother: "Stranger, every true
Thessalian, so the story goes, can hew
A bull's limbs clean, and tame a mountain steed.
Take up the steel, and show us if indeed
Rumour speak true." Right swift Orestes took
The Dorian blade, back from his shoulders shook
His broochèd mantle, called on Pylades
To aid him, and waved back the thralls. With ease
Heelwise he held the bull, and with one glide
Bared the white limb; then stripped the mighty
hide

From off him, swifter than a runner runs
His furlongs, and laid clean the flank. At once
Aegisthus stooped, and lifted up with care
The ominous parts, and gazed. No lobe was there;
But lo, strange caves of gall, and, darkly raised,
The portal vein boded to him that gazed
Fell visitations. Dark as night his brow
Clouded. Then spake Orestes: "Why art thou
Cast down so sudden?" "Guest," he cried, "there be
Treasons from whence I know not, seeking me.
Of all my foes, 'tis Agamemnon's son;
His hate is on my house, like war." "Have done!"
Orestes cried: "thou fear'st an exile's plot,
Lord of a city? Make thy cold heart hot
With meat.—Ho, fling me a Thessalian steel!
This Dorian is too light. I will unseal
The breast of him." He took the heavier blade,
And clave the bone. And there Aegisthus stayed,
The omens in his hand, dividing slow
This sign from that; till, while his head bent low,

ELECTRA

Up with a leap thy brother flashed the sword,
Then down upon his neck, and cleft the cord
Of brain and spine. Shuddering the body stood
One instant in an agony of blood,
And gasped and fell. The henchmen saw, and
straight

Flew to their spears, a host of them to set
Against those twain. But there the twain did
stand

Unfaltering, each his iron in his hand,
Edge fronting edge. Till "Hold," Orestes calls:
"I come not as in wrath against these walls
And mine own people. One man righteously
I have slain, who slew my father. It is I,
The wronged Orestes! Hold, and smite me not,
Old housefolk of my father!" When they caught
That name, their lances fell. And one old man,
An ancient in the house, drew nigh to scan
His face, and knew him. Then with one accord
They crowned thy brother's temples, and outpoured
Joy and loud songs. And hither now he fares
To show the head, no Gorgon, that he bears,
But that Aegisthus whom thou hatest! Yea,
Blood against blood, his debt is paid this day.

*[He goes off to meet the others—ELECTRA stands
as though stupefied.]*

CHORUS.

Now, now thou shalt dance in our dances,
Beloved, as a fawn in the night!
The wind is astir for the glances
Of thy feet; thou art robed with delight.

EURIPIDES

He hath conquered, he cometh to free us
With garlands new-won,
More high than the crowns of Alpheüs,
Thine own father's son:
Cry, cry, for the day that is won!

ELECTRA.

O Light of the Sun, O chariot wheels of flame,
O Earth and Night, dead Night without a name
That held me! Now mine eyes are raised to see,
And all the doorways of my soul flung free.
Aegisthus dead! My father's murderer dead!
What have I still of wreathing for the head
Stored in my chambers? Let it come forth now
To bind my brother's and my conqueror's brow.

[Some garlands are brought out from the house to

ELECTRA.

CHORUS.

Go, gather thy garlands, and lay them
As a crown on his brow, many-tressed,
But our feet shall refrain not nor stay them:
'Tis the joy that the Muses have blest.
For our king is returned as from prison,
The old king, to be master again,
Our belovèd in justice re-risen:
With guile he hath slain . . .
But cry, cry in joyance again!

*[There enter from the left ORESTES and
PYLADES, followed by some thralls.*

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

O conqueror, come! The king that trampled Troy
Knoweth his son Orestes. Come in joy,
Brother, and take to bind thy rippling hair
My crowns! . . . O what are crowns, that runners
wear

For some vain race? But thou in battle true
Hast felled our foe Aegisthus, him that slew
By craft thy sire and mine. [*She crowns* ORESTES.

And thou no less,
O friend at need, O reared in righteousness,
Take, Pylades, this chaplet from my hand.
'Twas half thy battle. And may ye two stand
Thus always, victory-crowned, before my face!
[*She crowns* PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Electra, first as workers of this grace
Praise thou the Gods, and after, if thou will,
Praise also me, as chosen to fulfil
God's work and Fate's.—Aye, 'tis no more a
dream;

In very deed I come from slaying him.
Thou hast the knowledge clear, but lo, I bring
More also. See himself, dead!
[*Attendants bring in the body of AEGISTHUS on a bier.*

Wouldst thou fling
This lord on the rotting earth for beasts to tear?
Or up, where all the vultures of the air
May glut them, pierce and nail him for a sign
Far off? Work all thy will. Now he is thine.

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA.

It shames me; yet, God knows, I hunger sore—

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou? Speak; the old fear nevermore
Need touch thee.

ELECTRA.

To let loose upon the dead
My hate! Perchance to rouse on mine own head
The sleeping hate of the world?

ORESTES.

No man that lives
Shall scathe thee by one word.

ELECTRA.

Our city gives
Quick blame; and little love have men for me.

ORESTES.

If aught thou hast unsaid, sister, be free
And speak. Between this man and us no bar
Cometh nor stint, but the utter rage of war.

*[She goes and stands over the body. A moment's
silence.]*

ELECTRA.

Ah me, what have I? What first flood of hate
To loose upon thee? What last curse to sate
My pain, or river of wild words to flow
Bank-high between? . . . Nothing? . . . And yet I
know
There hath not passed one sun, but through the long

ELECTRA

Cold dawns, over and over, like a song,
I have said them—words held back, O, some day yet
To flash into thy face, would but the fret
Of ancient fear fall loose and let me free.
And free I am, now; and can pay to thee
At last the weary debt.

Oh, thou didst kill
My soul within. Who wrought thee any ill,
That thou shouldst make me fatherless? Aye, me
And this my brother, loveless, solitary?
’Twas thou didst bend my mother to her shame:
Thy weak hand murdered him who led to fame
The hosts of Hellas—thou, that never crossed
O’erseas to Troy! . . . God help thee, wast thou lost
In blindness, long ago, dreaming, some-wise,
She would be true with thee, whose sin and lies
Thyself had tasted in my father’s place?
And then, that thou wert happy, when thy days
Were all one pain? Thou knewest ceaselessly
Her kiss a thing unclean, and she knew thee
A lord so little true, so dearly won!
So lost ye both, being in falseness one,
What fortune else had granted; she thy curse,
Who marred thee as she loved thee, and thou hers . . .
And on thy ways thou heardest men whispering,
“Lo, the Queen’s husband yonder”—not “the King.”

And then the lie of lies that dimmed thy brow,
Vaunting that by thy gold, thy chattels, Thou
Wert Something; which themselves are nothingness,
Shadows, to clasp a moment ere they cease.
The thing thou art, and not the things thou hast,
Abideth, yea, and bindeth to the last
Thy burden on thee: while all else, ill-won

EURIPIDES

And sin-companioned, like a flower o'erblown,
Flies on the wind away.

Or didst thou find
In women . . . Women? . . . Nay, peace, peace!

The blind
Could read thee. Cruel wast thou in thine hour,
Lord of a great king's house, and like a tower
Firm in thy beauty.

[Starting back with a look of loathing.]

Ah, that girl-like face!
God grant, not that, not that, but some plain grace
Of manhood to the man who brings me love:
A father of straight children, that shall move
Swift on the wings of War.

So, get thee gone!
Naught knowing how the great years, rolling on,
Have laid thee bare, and thy long debt full paid.

O vaunt not, if one step be proudly made
In evil, that all Justice is o'ercast:
Vaunt not, ye men of sin, ere at the last
The thin-drawn marge before you glimmereth
Close, and the goal that wheels 'twixt life and death.

LEADER.

Justice is mighty. Passing dark hath been
His sin: and dark the payment of his sin.

ELECTRA (*with a weary sigh, turning from the body*).

Ah me! Go, some of you, bear him from sight,
That when my mother come, her eyes may light
On nothing, nothing, till she know the sword . . .

[The body is borne into the hut. PYLADES goes with it.]

ELECTRA

ORESTES (*looking along the road*).

Stay, 'tis a new thing! We have still a word
To speak . . .

ELECTRA.

What? Not a rescue from the town
Thou seest?

ORESTES.

'Tis my mother comes: my own
Mother, that bare me. [*He takes off his crown.*]

ELECTRA (*springing, as it were, to life again, and
moving where she can see the road*).

Straight into the snare!
Aye, there she cometh.—Welcome in thy rare
Chariot! All welcome in thy brave array!

ORESTES.

What would we with our mother? Didst thou say
Kill her?

ELECTRA (*turning on him*).

What? Is it pity? Dost thou fear
To see thy mother's shape?

ORESTES.

'Twas she that bare
My body into life. She gave me suck.
How can I strike her?

EURIPIDES

ELECTRA.

Strike her as she struck
Our father!

ORESTES (*to himself, brooding*).

Phoebus, God, was all thy mind
Turned unto darkness?

ELECTRA.

If thy God be blind,
Shalt thou have light?

ORESTES (*as before*).

Thou, thou, didst bid me kill
My mother: which is sin.

ELECTRA.

How brings it ill
To thee, to raise our father from the dust?

ORESTES.

I was a clean man once. Shall I be thrust
From men's sight, blotted with her blood?

ELECTRA.

Thy blot
Is black as death if him thou succour not!

ORESTES.

Who shall do judgment on me, when she dies?

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Who shall do judgment, if thy father lies
Forgotten?

ORESTES (*turning suddenly to ELECTRA*).

Stay! How if some fiend of Hell,
Hid in God's likeness, spake that oracle?

ELECTRA.

In God's own house? I trow not.

ORESTES.

And I trow
It was an evil charge! [*He moves away from her.*]

ELECTRA (*almost despairing*).

To fail me now!
To fail me now! A coward!—O brother, no!

ORESTES.

What shall it be, then? The same stealthy blow . . .

ELECTRA.

That slew our father! Courage! thou hast slain
Aegisthus.

ORESTES.

Aye. So be it.—I have ta'en
A path of many terrors: and shall do
Deeds horrible. 'Tis God will have it so. . . .
Is this the joy of battle, or wild woe?
[*He goes into the house.*]

EURIPIDES

LEADER.

O Queen o'er Argos thronèd high,
O Woman, sister of the twain,
God's Horsemen, stars without a stain,
Whose home is in the deathless sky,
Whose glory in the sea's wild pain,
Toiling to succour men that die:
Long years above us hast thou been,
God-like for gold and marvelled power:
Ah, well may mortal eyes this hour
Observe thy state: All hail, O Queen!

*Enter from the right CLYTEMNESTRA on a chariot,
accompanied by richly dressed Handmaidens.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Down from the wain, ye dames of Troy, and hold
Mine arm as I dismount. . . .

[*Answering ELECTRA's thought.*

The spoils and gold
Of Ilion I have sent out of my hall
To many shrines. These bondwomen are all
I keep in mine own house . . . Deemst thou the
cost
Too rich to pay me for the child I lost—
Fair though they be?

ELECTRA.

Nay, Mother, here am I
Bond likewise, yea, and homeless, to hold high
Thy royal arm!

ELECTRA

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Child, the war-slaves are here;
Thou needst not toil.

ELECTRA.

What was it but the spear
Of war, drove me forth too? Mine enemies
Have sacked my father's house, and, even as these,
Captives and fatherless, made me their prey.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It was thy father cast his child away,
A child he might have loved! . . . Shall I speak
out?

(*Controlling herself*) Nay; when a woman once is
caught about

With evil fame, there riseth in her tongue
A bitter spirit—wrong, I know! Yet, wrong
Or right, I charge ye look on the deeds done;
And if ye needs must hate, when all is known,
Hate on! What profits loathing ere ye know?

My father gave me to be his. 'Tis so.
But was it his to kill me, or to kill
The babes I bore? Yet, lo, he tricked my will
With fables of Achilles' love: he bore
To Aulis and the dark ship-clutching shore,
He held above the altar-flame, and smote,
Cool as one reaping, through the strained throat,
My white Iphigenia. . . . Had it been
To save some falling city, leaguered in

EURIPIDES

With foemen; to prop up our castle towers,
And rescue other children that were ours,
Giving one life for many, by God's laws
I had forgiven all! Not so. Because
Helen was wanton, and her master knew
No curb for her: for that, for that, he slew
My daughter!—Even then, with all my wrong,
No wild beast yet was in me. Nay, for long,
I never would have killed him. But he came,
At last, bringing that damsel, with the flame
Of God about her, mad and knowing all:
And set her in my rooms; and in one wall
Would hold two queens!—O wild are woman's eyes
And hot her heart. I say not otherwise.
But, being thus wild, if then her master stray
To love far off, and cast his own away,
Shall not her will break prison too, and wend
Somewhere to win some other for a friend?
And then on us the world's curse waxes strong
In righteousness! The lords of all the wrong
Must hear no curse!—I slew him. I trod then
The only road: which led me to the men
He hated. Of the friends of Argos whom
Durst I have sought, to aid me to the doom
I craved?—Speak if thou wouldst, and fear not me,
If yet thou deemst him slain unrighteously.

LEADER.

Thy words be just, yet shame their justice brings;
A woman true of heart should bear all things
From him she loves. And she who feels it not,
I cannot reason of her, nor speak aught.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

Remember, mother, thy last word of grace,
Bidding me speak, and fear not, to thy face.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So said I truly, child, and so say still.

ELECTRA.

Wilt softly hear, and after work me ill?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so, not so. I will but pleasure thee.

ELECTRA.

I answer then. And, mother, this shall be
My prayer of opening, where hangs the whole:
Would God that He had made thee clean of soul!
Helen and thou—O, face and form were fair,
Meet for men's praise; but sisters twain ye were,
Both things of naught, a stain on Castor's star.
And Helen slew her honour, born afar
In wilful ravishment: but thou didst slay
The highest man of the world. And now wilt say
'Twas wrought in justice for thy child laid low
At Aulis? . . . Ah, who knows thee as I know?
Thou, thou, who long ere aught of ill was done
Thy child, when Agamemnon scarce was gone,
Sate at the looking-glass, and tress by tress
Didst comb the twined gold in loneliness.
When any wife, her lord being far away,
Toils to be fair, O blot her out that day

EURIPIDES

As false within! What would she with a cheek
So bright in strange men's eyes, unless she seek
Some treason? None but I, thy child, could so
Watch thee in Hellas: none but I could know
Thy face of gladness when our enemies
Were strong, and the swift cloud upon thine eyes
If Troy seemed falling, all thy soul keen-set
Praying that he might come no more! . . . And yet
It was so easy to be true. A king
Was thine, not feebler, not in anything
Below Aegisthus; one whom Hellas chose
For chief beyond all kings. Aye, and God knows,
How sweet a name in Greece, after the sin
Thy sister wrought, lay in thy ways to win.
Ill deeds make fair ones shine, and turn thereto
Men's eyes.—Enough: but say he wronged thee; slew
By craft thy child:—what wrong had I done, what
The babe Orestes? Why didst render not
Back unto us, the children of the dead,
Our father's portion? Must thou heap thy bed
With gold of murdered men, to buy to thee
Thy strange man's arms? Justice! Why is not he
Who cast Orestes out, cast out again?
Not slain for me whom doubly he hath slain,
In living death, more bitter than of old
My sister's? Nay, when all the tale is told
Of blood for blood, what murder shall we make,
I and Orestes, for our father's sake?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, child; I know thy heart, from long ago.
Thou hast always loved him best. 'Tis oft-time so:
One is her father's daughter, and one hot

ELECTRA

To bear her mother's part. I blame thee not . . .

Yet think not I am happy, child; nor flown

With pride now, in the deeds my hand hath done . . .

[Seeing ELECTRA unsympathetic, she checks herself.]

But thou art all untended, comfortless

Of body and wild of raiment; and thy stress

Of travail scarce yet ended! . . . Woe is me!

'Tis all as I have willed it. Bitterly

I wrought against him, to the last blind deep

Of bitterness. . . . Woe's me!

ELECTRA.

Fair days to weep,

When help is not! Or stay: though he lie cold

Long since, there lives another of thy fold

Far off; there might be pity for thy son?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I dare not! . . . Yes, I fear him. 'Tis mine own

Life, and not his, comes first. And rumour saith

His heart yet burneth for his father's death.

ELECTRA.

Why dost thou keep thine husband ever hot

Against me?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis his mood. And thou art not
So gentle, child!

ELECTRA.

My spirit is too sore!

Howbeit, from this day I will no more

Hate him.

EURIPIDES

CLYTEMNESTRA (*with a flash of hope*).

O daughter!—Then, indeed, shall he,
I promise, never more be harsh to thee!

ELECTRA.

He lieth in my house, as 'twere his own.
'Tis that hath made him proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, art thou flown
To strife again so quick, child?

ELECTRA.

Well; I say
No more; long have I feared him, and alway
Shall fear him, even as now!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, daughter, peace!
It bringeth little profit, speech like this . . .
Why didst thou call me hither?

ELECTRA.

It reached thee,
My word that a man-child is born to me?
Do thou make offering for me—for the rite
I know not—as is meet on the tenth night.
I cannot; I have borne no child till now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Who tended thee? 'Tis she should make the vow.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA.

None tended me. Alone I bare my child

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What, is thy cot so friendless? And this wild
So far from aid?

ELECTRA.

Who seeks for friendship' sake
A beggar's house?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will go in, and make
Due worship for thy child, the Peace-bringer.
To all thy need I would be minister.
Then to my lord, where by the meadow side
He prays the woodland nymphs.

Ye handmaids, guide
My chariot to the stall, and when ye guess
The rite draws near its end, in readiness
Be here again. Then to my lord! . . . I owe
My lord this gladness, too.

*[The Attendants depart; CLYTEMNESTRA, left
alone, proceeds to enter the house.]*

ELECTRA.

Welcome below
My narrow roof! But have a care withal,
A grime of smoke lies deep upon the wall.
Soil not thy robe! . . .

EURIPIDES

Not far now shall it be,
The sacrifice God asks of me and thee.
The bread of Death is broken, and the knife
Lifted again that drank the Wild Bull's life:
And on his breast . . . Ha, Mother, hast slept well
Aforetime? Thou shalt lie with him in Hell.
That grace I give to cheer thee on thy road;
Give thou to me—peace from my father's blood!
[She follows her mother into the house.]

CHORUS.

Lo, the returns of wrong.
The wind as a changed thing
Whispereth overhead
Of one that of old lay dead
In the water lapping long:
My King, O my King!

A cry in the rafters then
Rang, and the marble dome:
"Mercy of God, not thou,
"Woman! To slay me now,
"After the harvests ten
"Now, at the last, come home!"

O Fate shall turn as the tide,
Turn, with a doom of tears
For the flying heart too fond;
A doom for the broken bond.
She hailed him there in his pride,
Home from the perilous years.

ELECTRA

In the heart of his wallèd lands,
In the Giants' cloud-capt ring;
Herself, none other, laid
The hone to the axe's blade;
She lifted it in her hands,
The woman, and slew her king.

Woe upon spouse and spouse,
Whatso of evil sway
Held her in that distress!
Even as a lioness
Breaketh the woodland boughs
Starving, she wrought her way.

VOICE OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Children, Children; in the name of God,
Slay not your mother!

A WOMAN.

Did ye hear a cry
Under the rafters?

ANOTHER.

I weep too, yea, I;
Down on the mother's heart the child hath trod!
[*A death-cry from within.*]

ANOTHER.

God bringeth Justice in his own slow tide.
Aye, cruel is thy doom; but thy deeds done
Evil, thou piteous woman, and on one
Whose sleep was by thy side!

[*The door bursts open, and ORESTES and
ELECTRA come forth in disorder. At-
tendants bring out the bodies of CLY-
TEMNESTRA and AEGISTHUS.*]

EURIPIDES

LEADER.

Lo, yonder, in their mother's new-spilt gore
Red-garmented and ghastly, from the door
They reel. . . . O horrible! Was it agony
Like this, she boded in her last wild cry?
There lives no seed of man calamitous,
Nor hath lived, like this seed of Tantalus.

ORESTES.

O Dark of the Earth, O God,
Thou to whom all is plain;
Look on my sin, my blood,
This horror of dead things twain:
Gathered as one they lie
Slain; and the slayer was I,
I, to pay for my pain!

ELECTRA.

Let tear rain upon tear,
Brother: but mine is the blame.
A fire stood over her,
And out of the fire I came,
I, in my misery. . . .
And I was the child at her knee.
"Mother" I named her name.

CHORUS.

Alas for Fate, for the Fate of thee,
O Mother, Mother of Misery:
And Misery, lo, hath turned again,

ELECTRA

To slay thee, Misery and more,
Even in the fruit thy body bore.
Yet hast thou Justice, Justice plain,
For a sire's blood spilt of yore!

ORESTES.

Apollo, alas for the hymn
Thou sangest, as hope in mine ear!
The Song was of Justice dim,
But the Deed is anguish clear;
And the Gift, long nights of fear,
Of blood and of wandering,
Where cometh no Greek thing,
Nor sight, nor sound on the air.
Yea, and beyond, beyond,
Roaming—what rest is there?
Who shall break bread with me?
Who, that is clean, shall see
And hate not the blood-red hand,
His mother's murderer?

ELECTRA.

And I? What clime shall hold
My evil, or roof it above?
I cried for dancing of old,
I cried in my heart for love:
What dancing waiteth me now?
What love that shall kiss my brow
Nor blench at the brand thereof?

CHORUS.

Back, back, in the wind and rain
Thy driven spirit wheeleth again.

EURIPIDES

Now is thine heart made clean within
That was dark of old and murder-fraught.
But, lo, thy brother; what hast thou wrought . . .
Yea, though I love thee . . . what woe, what sin,
On him, who willed it not!

ORESTES.

Saw'st thou her raiment there,
Sister, there in the blood?
She drew it back as she stood,
She opened her bosom bare,
She bent her knees to the earth,
The knees that bent in my birth . . .
And I . . . Oh, her hair, her hair . . .
[He breaks into inarticulate weeping.]

CHORUS.

Oh, thou didst walk in agony,
Hearing thy mother's cry, the cry
Of wordless wailing, well know I.

ELECTRA.

She stretched her hand to my cheek,
And there brake from her lips a moan;
"Mercy, my child, my own!"
Her hand clung to my cheek;
Clung, and my arm was weak;
And the sword fell and was gone.

CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, could thine eye
Look on the blood, and see her lie,
Thy mother, where she turned to die?

ELECTRA

ORESTES.

I lifted over mine eyes
My mantle: blinded I smote,
As one smiteth a sacrifice;
And the sword found her throat.

ELECTRA.

I gave thee the sign and the word
I touched with mine hand thy sword.

LEADER.

Dire is the grief ye have wrought.

ORESTES.

Sister, touch her again:
Oh, veil the body of her;
Shed on her raiment fair,
And close that death-red stain.
—Mother! And didst thou bear,
Bear in thy bitter pain,
To life, thy murderer?
[*The two kneel over the body of CLYTEMNES-*
TRA, and cover her with raiment.

ELECTRA.

On her that I loved of yore,
Robe upon robe I cast:
On her that I hated sore.

CHORUS.

O House that hath hated sore,
Behold thy peace at the last!

EURIPIDES

LEADER.

Ha, see: above the roof-tree high
There shineth . . . Is some spirit there
Of earth or heaven? That thin air
Was never trod by things that die!
What bodes it now that forth they fare,
To men revealèd visibly?

*[There appears in the air a vision of CASTOR
and POLYDEUCES. The mortals kneel or
veil their faces.]*

CASTOR.

Thou Agamemnon's Son, give ear! 'Tis we,
Castor and Polydeuces, call to thee,
God's Horsemen and thy mother's brethren twain.
An Argive ship, spent with the toiling main,
We bore but now to peace, and, here withal
Being come, have seen thy mother's bloody fall,
Our sister's. Righteous is her doom this day,
But not thy deed. And Phoebus, Phoebus . . .
Nay;

He is my lord; therefore I hold my peace.
Yet though in light he dwell, no light was this
He showed to thee, but darkness! Which do thou
Endure, as man must, chafing not. And now
Fare forth where Zeus and Fate have laid thy life.

The maid Electra thou shalt give for wife
To Pylades; then turn thy head and flee
From Argos' land. 'Tis never more for thee
To tread this earth where thy dead mother lies.
And, lo, in the air her Spirits, bloodhound eyes,

ELECTRA

Most horrible yet Godlike, hard at heel
Following shall scourge thee as a burning wheel,
Speed-maddened. Seek thou straight Athena's land,
And round her awful image clasp thine hand,
Praying: and she will fence them back, though hot
With flickering serpents, that they touch thee not,
Holding above thy brow her gorgon shield.

There is a hill in Athens, Ares' field,
Where first for that first death by Ares done
On Halirrhothius, Poseidon's son,
Who wronged his daughter, the great Gods of
yore

Held judgment: and true judgments evermore
Flow from that Hill, trusted of man and God.
There shalt thou stand arraignèd of this blood;
And of those judges half shall lay on thee
Death, and half pardon; so shalt thou go free.
For Phoebus in that hour, who bade thee shed
Thy mother's blood, shall take on his own head
The stain thereof. And ever from that strife
The law shall hold, that when, for death or life
Of one pursued, men's voices equal stand,
Then Mercy conquereth.—But for thee, the band
Of Spirits dread, down, down, in very wrath,
Shall sink beside that Hill, making their path
Through a dim chasm, the which shall aye be trod
By reverent feet, where men may speak with God.
But thou forgotten and far off shalt dwell,
By great Alpheüs' waters, in a dell
Of Arcady, where that gray Wolf-God's wall
Stands holy. And thy dwelling men shall call
Orestes' Town. So much to thee be spoke.
But this dead man, Aegisthus, all the folk

EURIPIDES

Shall bear to burial in a high green grave
Of Argos. For thy mother, she shall have
Her tomb from Menelaus, who hath come
This day, at last, to Argos, bearing home
Helen. From Egypt comes she, and the hall
Of Proteus, and in Troy hath ne'er at all
Set foot. 'Twas but a wraith of Helen, sent
By Zeus, to make much wrath and ravishment.

So forth for home, bearing the virgin bride,
Let Pylades make speed, and lead beside
Thy once-named brother, and with golden store
Stablish his house far off on Phocis' shore.

Up, gird thee now to the steep Isthmian way,
Seeking Athena's blessed rock; one day,
Thy doom of blood fulfilled and this long stress
Of penance past, thou shalt have happiness.

LEADER (*looking up*).

Is it for us, O Seed of Zeus,
To speak and hear your words again?

CASTOR. Speak: of this blood ye bear no stain.

ELECTRA. I also, sons of Tyndareus,

My kinsmen; may my word be said?

CASTOR. Speak: on Apollo's head we lay
The bloody doings of this day.

LEADER. Ye Gods, ye brethren of the dead,

Why held ye not the deathly herd
Of Kêres back from off this home?

CASTOR. There came but that which needs must
come

By ancient Fate and that dark word

ELECTRA

That rang from Phoebus in his mood.

ELECTRA. And what should Phoebus seek with me,
Or all God's oracles that be,
That I must bear my mother's blood?

CASTOR. Thy hand was as thy brother's hand,
Thy doom shall be as his. One stain,
From dim forefathers on the twain
Lighting, hath sapped your hearts as sand.

ORESTES. After so long, sister, to see
(*who has never raised his head, nor spoken to the Gods*). And hold thee, and then part, then part,
By all that chained thee to my heart
Forsaken, and forsaking thee!

CASTOR. Husband and house are hers. She bears
No bitter judgment, save to go
Exiled from Argos.

ELECTRA. And what woe,
What tears are like an exile's tears?

ORESTES. Exiled and more am I; impure,
A murderer in a stranger's hand!

CASTOR. Fear not. There dwells in Pallas' land
All holiness. Till then endure!

[ORESTES and ELECTRA embrace.]

ORESTES. Aye, closer; clasp my body well,
And let thy sorrow loose, and shed,
As o'er the grave of one new dead,
Dead evermore, thy last farewell!
[A sound of weeping.]

EURIPIDES

CASTOR. Alas, what would ye? For that cry
Ourselves and all the sons of heaven
Have pity. Yea, our peace is riven
By the strange pain of these that die.

ORESTES. No more to see thee! ELECTRA. Nor thy
breath
Be near my face! ORESTES. Ah, so it
ends.

ELECTRA. Farewell, dear Argos. All ye friends,
Farewell! ORESTES. O faithful unto death,
Thou goest? ELECTRA. Aye, I pass from
you,
Soft-eyed at last. ORESTES. Go, Pylades,
And God go with you! Wed in peace
My tall Electra, and be true.
[ELECTRA and PYLADES depart to the left.]

CASTOR.

Their troth shall fill their hearts.—But on:
Dread feet are near thee, hounds of pray,
Snake-handed, midnight-visaged, yea,
And bitter pains their fruit! Begone!
[ORESTES departs to the right.]

But hark, the far Sicilian sea
Calls, and a noise of men and ships
That labour sunken to the lips
In bitter billows; forth go we,
Through the long leagues of fiery blue,
With saving; not to souls unshriven;
But whoso in his life hath striven
To love things holy and be true,

ELECTRA

Through toil and storm we guard him; we
Save, and he shall not die!—Therefore,
O praise the lying man no more,
Nor with oath-breakers sail the sea:
Farewell, ye walkers on the shore
Of death! A God hath counselled ye.
[CASTOR *and* POLYDEUCES *disappear*.

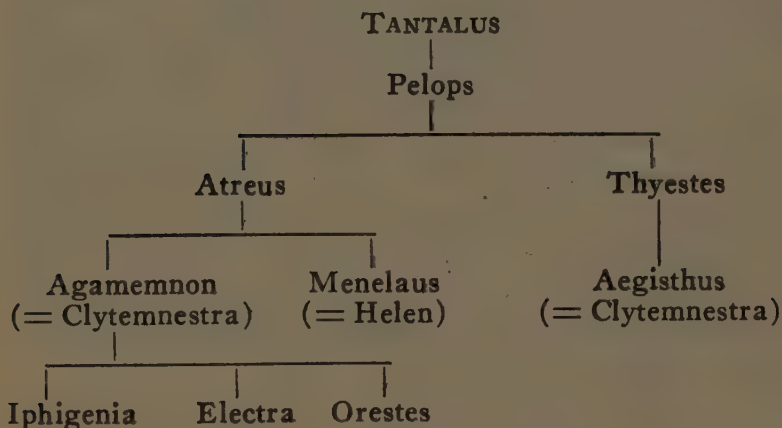
CHORUS.

Farewell, farewell!—But he who can so fare,
And stumbleth not on mischief anywhere,
Blessèd on earth is he!

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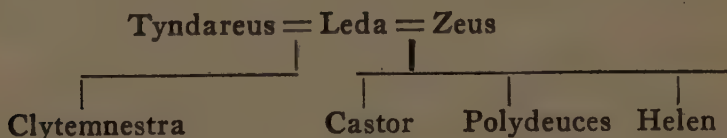
THE chief characters in the play belong to one family, as is shown by the two genealogies:—

I.



(Also, a sister of Agamemnon, name variously given, married Strophios, and was the mother of Pylades.)

II.



P. 3, l. 10, Son of his father's foe.]—Both foe and brother. Atreus and Thyestes became enemies after the theft of the Golden Lamb. See pp. 47 ff.

P. 3, l. 34, Must wed with me.]—In Aeschylus and Sophocles Electra is unmarried. This story of her peasant husband is found only in Euripides, but is

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not likely to have been wantonly invented by him. It was no doubt an existing legend—an *ὦν λόγος*, to use the phrase attributed to Euripides in the *Frogs* (l. 1052). He may have chosen to adopt it for several reasons. First, to marry Electra to a peasant was a likely step for Aegisthus to take, since any child born to her afterwards would bear a stigma, calculated to damage him fatally as a pretender to the throne. Again, it seemed to explain the name "A-lektra" (as if from *λεκτρὸν*, "bed;" cf. Schol. *Orestes*, 71, Soph. *El.* 962, *Ant.* 917) more pointedly than the commoner version. And it helps in the working out of Electra's character (cf. pp. 17, 22, &c.). Also it gives an opportunity of introducing the fine character of the peasant. He is an *Ἀγροργός*, literally "self-worker," a man who works his own land, far from the city, neither a slave nor a slave-master; "the men," as Euripides says in the *Orestes* (920), "who alone save a nation." (Cf. *Bac.*, p. 115 foot, and below, p. 26, ll. 367-390.) As Euripides became more and more alienated from the town democracy he tended, like Tolstoy and others, to idealise the workers of the soil.

P. 6, l. 62, Children to our enemy.]—Cf. 626. Soph. *El.* 589. They do not seem to be in existence at the time of the play.

Pp. 5-6.]—Electra's first two speeches are admirable as expositions of her character—the morbid nursing of hatred as a duty, the deliberate posing, the impulsiveness, the quick response to kindness.

P. 7, l. 82, Pylades.]—Pylades is a *persona muta* both here and in Sophocles' *Electra*, a fixed traditional figure, possessing no quality but devotion to Orestes. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* he speaks only once, with tremendous effect, at the crisis of the play, to rebuke Orestes when his heart fails him. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, however, and still more in the *Orestes*, he is a fully studied character.

P. 10, l. 151, A swan crying alone.]—Cf. *Bacchae*,

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p. 152, "As yearns the milk-white swan when old swans die."

P. 11, ll. 169 ff., The Watcher hath cried this day.]—Hera was an old Pelasgian goddess, whose worship was kept in part a mystery from the invading Achaeans or Dorians. There seems to have been a priest born "of the ancient folk," *i.e.*, a Pelasgian or aboriginal Mycenaean, who, by some secret lore—probably some ancient and superseded method of calculating the year—knew when Hera's festival was due, and walked round the country three days beforehand to announce it. He drank "the milk of the flock" and avoided wine, either from some religious taboo, or because he represented the religion of the milk-drinking mountain shepherds.

P. 13, ll. 220 ff.]—Observe Electra's cowardice when surprised; contrast her courage, p. 47, when sending Orestes off, and again her quick drop to despair when the news does not come soon enough.

P. 16, ll. 247 ff., I am a wife. . . . O better dead!]
—Rather ungenerous, when compared with her words on p. 6. (Cf. also her words on pp. 24 and 26.) But she feels this herself, almost immediately. Orestes naturally takes her to mean that her husband is one of Aegisthus' friends. This would have ruined his plot. (Cf. above, p. 8, l. 98.)

P. 22, l. 312, Castor.]—I know no other mention of Electra's betrothal to Castor. He was her kinsman: see below on l. 990.

Pp. 22-23, ll. 300-337.]—In this wonderful outbreak, observe the mixture of all sorts of personal resentments and jealousies with the devotion of the lonely woman to her father and her brother. "So men say," is an interesting touch; perhaps conscience tells her midway that she does not quite believe what she is saying. So is the self-conscious recognition of her "bitter burning brain" that interprets all things in a sort of distortion.—Observe, too, how instinctively

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she turns to the peasant for sympathy in the strain of her emotion. It is his entrance, perhaps, which prevents Orestes from being swept away and revealing himself. The peasant's courage towards two armed men is striking, as well as his courtesy and his sanity. He is the one character in the play not somehow tainted with blood-madness.

P. 27, ll. 403, 409.]—Why does Electra send her husband to the Old Man? Not, I think, really for want of the food. It would have been easier to borrow (p. 12, l. 191) from the Chorus; and, besides, what the peasant says is no doubt true, that, if she liked, she could find “many a pleasant thing” in the house. I think she sends for the Old Man because he is the only person who would know Orestes (p. 21, l. 285). She is already, like the Leader (p. 26, l. 401), excited by hopes which she will not confess. This reading makes the next scene clearer also.

Pp. 28-30, ll. 432-487, O for the Ships of Troy.]—The two main Choric songs of this play are markedly what Aristotle calls ἐμβόλιμα, “things thrown in.” They have no effect upon the action, and form little more than musical “relief.” Not that they are positively irrelevant. Agamemnon is in our minds all through the play, and Agamemnon's glory is of course enhanced by the mention of Troy and the praises of his subordinate king, Achilles.

Thetis, the Nereid, or sea-maiden, was won to wife by Peleus. (He wrestled with her on the sea-shore, and never loosed hold, though she turned into divers strange beings—a lion, and fire, and water, and sea-beasts.) She bore him Achilles, and then, unable permanently to live with a mortal, went back beneath the sea. When Achilles was about to sail to Troy, she and her sister Nereids brought him divine armour, and guided his ships across the Aegean. The designs on Achilles' armour, as on Heracles' shield, form a fairly common topic of poetry.

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The descriptions of the designs are mostly clear. Perseus with the Gorgon's head, guided by Hermes; the Sun on a winged chariot, and stars about him; two Sphinxes, holding as victims the men who had failed to answer the riddles which they sang; and, on the breastplate, the Chimaera attacking Bellerophon's winged horse, Pegasus. The name Pegasus suggested to a Greek *πηγή*, "fountain;" and the great spring of Pirene, near Corinth, was made by Pegasus stamping on the rock.

Pp. 30-47.]—The Old Man, like other old family servants in Euripides—the extreme case is in the *Ion*—is absolutely and even morbidly devoted to his masters. Delightful in this first scene, he becomes a little horrible in the next, where they plot the murders; not only ferocious himself, but, what seems worse, inclined to pet and enjoy the bloodthirstiness of his "little mistress."

Pp. 30-33, ll. 510-545.]—The Signs of Orestes. This scene, I think, has been greatly misunderstood by critics. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, which deals with the same subject as the *Electra*, the scene is at Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes lays his tress there in the prologue. Electra comes bringing libations, sees the hair, compares it with her own, finds that it is similar "wing for wing" (*δρόπτερος*—the same word as here), and guesses that it belongs to Orestes. She then measures the footprints, and finds one that is like her own, one not; evidently Orestes and a fellow-traveller! Orestes enters and announces himself; she refuses to believe, until he shows her a "woven thing," perhaps the robe which he is wearing, which she recognises as the work of her own hand.

The same signs, described in one case by the same peculiar word, occur here. The Old Man mentions one after the other, and Electra refutes or rejects them. It has been thought therefore that

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this scene was meant as an attack—a very weak and undignified attack—on Euripides' great master. No parallel for such an artistically ruinous proceeding is quoted from any Greek tragedy. And, apart from the improbability *a priori*, I do not think it even possible to read the scene in this sense. To my mind, Electra here rejects the signs not from reason, but from a sort of nervous terror. She dares not believe that Orestes has come; because, if it prove otherwise, the disappointment will be so terrible. As to both signs, the lock of hair and the footprints, her arguments may be good; but observe that she is afraid to make the comparison at all. And as to the footprint, she says there cannot be one, when the Old Man has just seen it! And, anyhow, she will not go to see it! Similarly as to the robe, she does her best to deny that she ever wove it, though she and the Old Man both remember it perfectly. She is fighting tremulously, with all her flagging strength, against the thing she longs for. The whole point of the scene requires that one ray of hope after another should be shown to Electra, and that she should passionately, blindly, reject them all. That is what Euripides wanted the signs for.

But why, it may be asked, did he adopt Aeschylus' signs, and even his peculiar word? Because, whether invented by Aeschylus or not, these signs were a canonical part of the story by the time Euripides wrote. Every one who knew the story of Orestes' return at all, knew of the hair and the footprint. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* (534 ff.) uses them proverbially, when he speaks of his comedy "recognising its brother's tress." It would have been frivolous to invent new ones. As a matter of fact, it seems probable that the signs are older than Aeschylus; neither they nor the word *δρόπτερος* particularly suit Aeschylus' purpose. (Cf. Dr. Verrall's introduction to

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the *Libation-Bearers*.) They probably come from the old lyric poet, Stesichorus.

P. 43, l. 652, New-mothered of a Man-Child.]—Her true Man-Child, the Avenger whom they had sought to rob her of! This pitiless plan was suggested apparently by the sacrifice to the Nymphs (p. 40). "Weep my babe's low station" is of course ironical. The babe would set a seal on Electra's degradation to the peasant class, and so end the blood-feud, as far as she was concerned. Clytemnestra, longing for peace, must rejoice in Electra's degradation. Yet she has motherly feelings too, and in fact hardly knows what to think or do till she can consult Aegisthus (p. 71). Electra, it would seem, actually calculates upon these feelings, while despising them.

P. 45, l. 669, If but some man will guide me.]—A suggestion of the irresolution or melancholia that beset Orestes afterwards, alternating with furious action. (Cf. Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, Euripides' *Andromache* and *Orestes*.)

P. 45, l. 671, Zeus of my sires, &c.]—In this invocation, short and comparatively unmoving, one can see perhaps an effect of Aeschylus' play. In the *Libation-Bearers* the invocation of Agamemnon comprises 200 lines of extraordinarily eloquent poetry.

P. 47 ff., ll. 699 ff.]—The Golden Lamb. The theft of the Golden Lamb is treated as a story of the First Sin, after which all the world was changed and became the poor place that it now is. It was at least the First Sin in the blood-feud of this drama.

The story is not explicitly told. Apparently the magic lamb was brought by Pan from the gods, and given to Atreus as a special grace and a sign that he was the true king. His younger brother, Thyestes, helped by Atreus' wife, stole it and claimed to be king himself. So good was turned into evil, and love into hatred, and the stars shaken in their courses.

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[It is rather curious that the Lamb should have such a special effect upon the heavens and the weather. It is the same in Plato (*Polit.* 268 ff.), and more definitely so in the treatise *De Astrologia*, attributed to Lucian, which says that the Golden Lamb is the constellation Aries, "The Ram." Hugo Winckler (*Weltanschauung des alten Orients*, pp. 30, 31) suggests that the story is a piece of Babylonian astronomy misunderstood. It seems that the vernal equinox, which is now moving from the Ram into the Fish, was in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. moving from the Bull into the Ram. Now the Bull, Marduk, was the special god of Babylon, and the time when he yielded his place to the Ram was also, as a matter of fact, the time of the decline of Babylon. The gradual advance of the Ram not only upset the calendar, and made all the seasons wrong, but seemed, since it coincided with the fall of the Great City, to upset the world in general! Of course Euripides would know nothing of this. He was apparently attracted to the Golden Lamb merely by the quaint beauty of the story.]

P. 50, l. 746, Thy brethren even now.]—Castor and Polydeuces, who were received into the stars after their death. See below, on l. 990.

P. 51, l. 757, That answer bids me die.]—Why? Because Orestes, if he won at all, would win by a surprise attack, and would send news instantly. A prolonged conflict, without a message, would mean that Orestes and Pylades were being overpowered. Of course she is wildly impatient.

P. 51, l. 765, Who art thou? I mistrust thee.]—Just as she mistrusted the Old Man's signs. See above, p. 89.

P. 52 ff., ll. 774 ff.]—Messenger's Speech. This speech, though swift and vivid, is less moving and also less sympathetic than most of the Messengers' Speeches. Less moving, because the slaying of

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Aegisthus has little moral interest; it is merely a daring and dangerous exploit. Less sympathetic, because even here, in the first and comparatively blameless step of the blood-vengeance, Euripides makes us feel the treacherous side of it. A *δολοφονία*, a "slaying by guile," even at its best, remains rather an ugly thing.

P. 53, l. 793, Then quickly spake Orestes.]—If Orestes had washed with Aegisthus, he would have become his *xenos*, or guest, as much as if he had eaten his bread and salt. In that case the slaying would have been definitely a crime, a dishonourable act. Also, Aegisthus would have had the right to ask his name.—The unsuspectingness of Aegisthus is partly natural; it was not thus, alone and unarmed, that he expected Orestes to stand before him. Partly it seems like a heaven-sent blindness. Even the omens do not warn him, though no doubt in a moment more they would have done so.

P. 56, l. 878, With guile he hath slain.]—So the MSS. The Chorus have already a faint feeling, quickly suppressed, that there may be another side to Orestes' action. Most editors alter the text to mean "He hath slain these guileful ones."

P. 58, l. 900, It shames me, yet God knows I hunger sore.]—To treat the dead with respect was one of the special marks of a Greek as opposed to a barbarian. It is possible that the body of Aegisthus might legitimately have been refused burial, or even nailed on a cross as Orestes in a moment of excitement suggests. But to insult him lying dead would be a shock to all Greek feeling. ("Unholy is the voice of loud thanksgiving over slaughtered men," *Odyssey* xxii. 412.) Any excess of this kind, any violence towards the helpless, was apt to rouse "The sleeping wrath of the world." There was a Greek proverb, "Even an injured dog has his Erinyes"—*i.e.*, his unseen guardian or avenger. It is interesting, though

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not surprising, to hear that men had little love for Electra. The wonderful speech that follows, though to a conventional Greek perhaps the most outrageous thing of which she is guilty, shows best the inherent nobility of her character before years of misery had "killed her soul within."

P. 59, ll. 928 f., Being in falseness one, &c.]—The Greek here is very obscure and almost certainly corrupt.

P. 61, l. 964, 'Tis my mother comes]—The reaction has already begun in Orestes. In the excitement and danger of killing his enemy he has shown coolness and courage, but now a work lies before him vastly more horrible, a little more treacherous, and with no element of daring to redeem it. Electra, on the other hand, has done nothing yet; she has merely tried, not very successfully, to revile the dead body, and her hate is unsatisfied. Besides, one sees all through the play that Aegisthus was a kind of odious stranger to her; it was the woman, her mother, who came close to her and whom she really hated.

P. 63, l. 979, Was it some fiend of Hell?]—The likeness to *Hamlet* is obvious. ("The spirit that I have seen May be the Devil." End of Act II.)

P. 63, l. 983, How shall it be then, the same stealthy blow? . . .]—He means, I think, "the same as that with which I have already murdered an unsuspecting man to-day," but Electra for her own purposes misinterprets him.

P. 64, l. 990, God's horsemen, stars without a stain.]—Cf. above, ll. 312, 746. Castor and Polydeuces were sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen, and half-brothers of Clytemnestra, whose father was the mortal Tyndareus. They lived as knights without reproach, and afterwards became stars and demigods. The story is told that originally Castor was mortal and Polydeuces immortal; but when Castor was fatally wounded Polydeuces prayed

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that he might be allowed to give him half his immortality. The prayer was granted; and the two live as immortals, yet, in some mysterious way, knowing the taste of death. Unlike the common sinners and punishers of the rest of the play, these Heroes find their "glory" in saving men from peril and suffering, especially at sea, where they appear as the globes of light, called St. Elmo's fire, upon masts and yards.

Pp. 64-71, ll. 998 ff.]—Clytemnestra. "And what sort of woman is this doomed and 'evil' Queen? We know the majestic murderess of Aeschylus, so strong as to be actually beautiful, so fearless and unrepentant that one almost feels her to be right. One can imagine also another figure that would be theatrically effective—a 'sympathetic' sinner, beautiful and penitent, eager to redeem her sin by self-sacrifice. But Euripides gives us neither. Perhaps he believed in neither. It is a piteous and most real character that we have here, in this sad middle-aged woman, whose first words are an apology; controlling quickly her old fires, anxious to be as little hated as possible. She would even atone, one feels, if there were any safe way of atonement; but the consequences of her old actions are holding her, and she is bound to persist. . . . In her long speech it is scarcely to Electra that she is chiefly speaking; it is to the Chorus, perhaps to her own bondmaids; to any or all of the people whose shrinking so frets her." (*Independent Review*, l.c.)

P. 65, l. 1011, Cast his child away.]—The Greek fleet assembled for Troy was held by contrary winds at Aulis, in the Straits of Euboea, and the whole expedition was in danger of breaking up. The prophets demanded a human sacrifice, and Agamemnon gave his own daughter, Iphigenia. He induced Clytemnestra to send her to him, by the pretext that Achilles had asked for her in marriage.

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P. 66, l. 1046, Which led me to the men he hated.]—It made Clytemnestra's crime worse, that her accomplice was the blood-foe.

Pp. 65-68. As elsewhere in Euripides, these two speeches leave the matter undecided. He does not attempt to argue the case out. He gives us a flash of light, as it were, upon Clytemnestra's mind and then upon Electra's. Each believes what she is saying, and neither understands the whole truth. It is clear that Clytemnestra, being left for ten years utterly alone, and having perhaps something of Helen's temperament about her, naturally fell in love with the Lord of a neighbouring castle; and having once committed herself, had no way of saving her life except by killing her husband, and afterwards either killing or keeping strict watch upon Orestes and Electra. Aegisthus, of course, was deliberately plotting to carry out his blood-feud and to win a great kingdom.

P. 72, l. 1156, For the flying heart too fond.]—The text is doubtful, but this seems to be the literal translation, and the reference to Clytemnestra is intelligible enough.

P. 73, l. 1157, The giants' cloud-capped ring.]—The great walls of Mycenae, built by the Cyclopes; cf. *Trojan Women*, p. 64, "Where the towers of the giants shine O'er Argos cloudily."

P. 75, l. 1201, Back, back in the wind and rain.]—The only explicit moral judgment of the Chorus; cf. note on l. 878.

P. 77, l. 1225, I touched with my hand thy sword.]—i.e., Electra dropped her own sword in horror, then in a revulsion of feeling laid her hand upon Orestes' sword—out of generosity, that he might not bear his guilt alone.

P. 78, l. 1241, An Argive ship.]—This may have been the ship of Menelaus, which was brought to Argos by Castor and Polydeuces, see l. 1278. *Helena*

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1663. The ships labouring in the "Sicilian sea" (p. 82, l. 1347) must have suggested to the audience the ships of the great expedition against Sicily, then drawing near to its destruction. The Athenian fleet was destroyed early in September 413 B.C.: this play was probably produced in the spring of the same year, at which time the last reinforcements were being sent out.

P. 78, l. 1249.]—Marriage of Pylades and Electra. A good example of the essentially historic nature of Greek tragedy. No one would have invented a marriage between Electra and Pylades for the purposes of this play. It is even a little disturbing. But it is here, because it was a fixed fact in the tradition (cf. *Iphigenia in Tauris*, l. 915 ff.), and could not be ignored. Doubtless there were people living who claimed descent from Pylades and Electra.

P. 79, l. 1253, Scourge thee as a burning wheel.]—At certain feasts a big wheel soaked in some inflammable resin or tar was set fire to and rolled down a mountain.

P. 79, l. 1258, There is a hill in Athens.]—The great fame of the Areopagus as a tribunal for manslaughter (see Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) cannot have been due merely to its incorruptibility. Hardly any Athenian tribunal was corruptible. But the Areopagus in very ancient times seems to have superseded the early systems of "blood-feud" or "blood-debt" by a humane and rational system of law, taking account of intention, provocation, and the varying degrees of guilt. The Erinyes, being the old Pelasgian avengers of blood, now superseded, have their dwelling in a cavern underneath the Areopagus.

P. 80, ll. 1276 ff.]—The graves of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra actually existed in Argos (Paus. ii. 16, 7). They form, so to speak, the concrete material fact round which the legend of this play circles (cf. Ridgeway in *Hellenic Journal*, xxiv. p. xxxix.).

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P. 80, l. 1280.]—Helen. The story here adumbrated is taken from Stesichorus, and forms the plot of Euripides' play *Helena* (cf. Herodotus, ii. 113 ff.).

P. 80, l. 1295, I also, sons of Tyndareus.]—Observe that Electra claims the gods as cousins (cf. p. 22, l. 313), addressing them by the name of their mortal father. The Chorus has called them "sons of Zeus." In the same spirit she faces the gods, complains, and even argues, while Orestes never raises his eyes to them.

P. 80, l. 1300.]—Kêres. The death-spirits that flutter over our heads, as Homer says, "innumerable, whom no man can fly nor hide from."

P. 82, l. 1329, Yea, our peace is riven by the strange pain of these that die.]—Cf. the attitude of Artemis at the end of the *Hippolytus*. Sometimes Euripides introduces gods whose peace is not riven, but then they are always hateful. (Cf. Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, Athena in the *Trojan Women*.)

P. 82, l. 1336, O faithful unto death.]—This is the last word we hear of Electra, and it is interesting. With all her unlovely qualities it remains true that she was faithful—faithful to the dead and the absent, and to what she looked upon as a fearful duty.

Additional Note on the presence of the Argive women during the plot against the King and Queen. (Cf. especially p. 19, l. 272, These women hear us.)—It would seem to us almost mad to speak so freely before the women. But one must observe: 1. Stasis, or civil enmity, ran very high in Greece, and these women were of the party that hated Aegisthus. 2. There runs all through Euripides a very strong conception of the cohesiveness of women, their secretiveness, and their faithfulness to one another. Medea, Iphigenia, and Creusa, for instance, trust their women

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friends with secrets involving life and death, and the secrets are kept. On the other hand, when a man—Xuthus in the *Ion*—tells the Chorus women a secret, they promptly and with great courage betray him. Aristophanes leaves the same impression; and so do many incidents in Greek history. Cf. the murders plotted by the Athenian women (Hdt. v. 87), and both by and against the Lemnian women (Hdt. vi. 138). The subject is a large one, but I would observe: 1. Athenian women were kept as a rule very much together, and apart from men. 2. At the time of the great invasions the women of a community must often have been of different race from the men; and this may have started a tradition of behaviour. 3. Members of a subject (or disaffected) nation have generally this cohesiveness: in Ireland, Poland, and parts of Turkey the details of a political crime will, it is said, be known to a whole countryside, but not a whisper come to the authorities.

Of course the mere mechanical fact that the Chorus had to be present on the stage counts for something. It saved the dramatist trouble to make his heroine confide in the Chorus. But I do not think Euripides would have used this situation so often unless it had seemed to him both true to life and dramatically interesting.

CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION

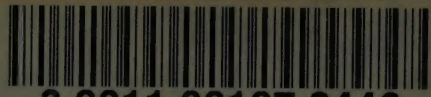


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Euripides.

Five plays of Euripides



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